

AUTHENTIC *Science* FICTION

**MICE OR
MACHINES**

by H. J. Campbell

1/6

MONTHLY
NO. 22

INSIDE!

FORREST J. ACKERMAN WRITES
FROM AMERICA

"Two weeks ago I bought a 'Joan the Wad' and to-day I have won £232 10s. Please send two more."—B.C., Tredegar, S. Wales.

Extract from "Everybody's Fortune Book," 1931.



*Guaranteed dipped in water
from the Lucky Saint's Well.*

JOAN the WAD

is the

LUCKY CORNISH PISKEY

who

SEES ALL, HEARS ALL, DOES ALL

JOAN THE WAD is Queen of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys. Thousands of persons all over the world claim that Joan the Wad has brought them Wonderful Luck in the way of Health, Wealth and Happiness.

HISTORY FREE FOR A STAMP.

If you will send me your name and address and a 1/- stamp and a stamped addressed envelope for reply, I will send you a History of the Cornish Piskey folk and the marvellous miracles they accomplish. JOAN THE WAD is the Queen of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys, and with whom good luck and good health always attend.

AS HEALER

One Lady writes: "My sister suffered very badly for years, but since I gave her a Joan the Wad to keep near her she is much easier. Do you think this is due to Joan or the Water from the Lucky Well?"

AS LUCK BRINGER

Another writes: "Since the War my wife and I have been dogged by persistent ill-luck, and we seemed to be sinking lower and lower. One day someone sent us a Joan the Wad. We have never found out who it was, but, coincidence if you like, within a week I got a much better job and my wife had some money left her. Since then we have never looked back and, needless to say, swear by 'Queen Joan.'"

AS MATCHMAKER

A young girl wrote and informed me that she had had scores of boy friends, but it was not until she had visited Cornwall and taken Joan back with her that she met the boy of her dreams, and as they got better acquainted she discovered he also has "Joan the Wad."

AS PRIZEWINNER

A young man wrote us only last week: "For two years I entered competitions without luck, but since getting Joan the Wad I have frequently been successful although I have not won a big prize, but I know that . . . , who won £2,000 in a competition, has one because I gave it him. When he won his £2,000 he gave me £100 for myself, so you see I have cause to bless 'Queen Joan.'"

AS SPECULATOR

A man writes: "I had some shares that for several years I couldn't give away. They were 1/- shares, and all of a sudden they went up in the market to 7/9. I happened to be staring at Joan the Wad. Pure imagination, you may say, but I thought I saw her wink approvingly. I sold out, reinvested the money at greater profit and have prospered ever since."

All you have to do is to send a 1/- stamp (Savings Stamps accepted) and a stamped addressed envelope for the history to—

44, JOAN'S COTTAGE, LANIVET, BODMIN

For Canada and U.S.A. send 50 cents for History, or 2 Dollars for both History and Mascot.

For Australia, send 1s. 6d. for History, or 8s. 0d. for both History and Mascot.

AUTHENTIC

Science

FICTION

NUMBER TWENTY-TWO

Editor: Derrick Rowles

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keen thought

◆ WE ALWAYS thought our readers were found among the keener thinking people. Now we know it for sure. You may remember that in the editorial to our issue No. 18 we mentioned that CHAOS IN MINIATURE contained one assumption that is not in accordance with modern theories. We invited readers to spot the assumption and let us know.

Promptly after publication came a deluge of letters from readers triumphantly putting the finger on the weak point. Practically all of them were right. One or two others thought they'd found slips which weren't slips at all. We are now reassured that our readers know an accurate story when they see one—and we are redoubling our efforts to see that all our stories fall into this category.

The assumption in CHAOS IN MINIATURE was, of course, that the 'shrink ray' could diminish both volume and weight. Yet it was pointed out later in the story that the diminished object's mass was unaffected. This, to say the

least, is slightly at variance with current scientific ideas. But you all thought it was a good story anyway; and we did *tell* you!

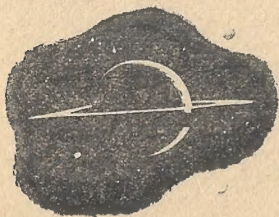
◆ WE WERE privileged a while back to attend a practical demonstration of the properties of rocket fuels, sponsored by the British Interplanetary Society and carried out by Dr. W. R. Maxwell, Superintendent at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Rocket Propellant Division, Westcott.

Dr. Maxwell dealt with liquid calcium permanganate, Mirof, oxygen, hydrogen peroxide, cordite and gunpowder. The experiments he conducted were exciting and absorbing and not a little spectacular. He had rigged up a working model jet arrangement with a two-feed fuel supply that spontaneously ignited when the fuels met. The resulting roaring holocaust was a fine example of things to come.

Dr. Maxwell appears to be one of the old school of scientist—he thinks nothing of pouring liquid oxygen over himself, steeping his hand in hydrogen peroxide, holding a burning stick of cordite and lugging boxes of tamped gunpowder about.

It is nice to know that a man of this calibre is so intimately connected with official rocket research and that he will spare time to enlighten those interested in space flight.

EDITOR.



s-f handbook

Terms of interest to science-fictioneer

Catalyst—a substance which alters the rate of a chemical reaction without itself undergoing any change. Our digestive juices are catalysts produced by living cells.

Celestial equator—the circle which the plane of the Earth's equator makes on meeting the Celestial Sphere.

Celestial Sphere—an imaginary sphere on which the heavenly bodies are supposed to lie. We stand at its centre.

Cepheid variables—stars that fluctuate in brightness over a given period. The longer the period, the brighter the star. These variables enable astronomers to measure very great distances.

Chromosphere—layer outside the photosphere of the Sun. The chromosphere is normally only visible at total eclipse.

Clusters—groups of stars. Open clusters—like the Pleiades—consist of about 500 stars over a wide area. Globular clusters—like NGC 6553—are composed of thousands of stars in a compact mass lying outside the Milky Way.

Coelostat—an instrument consisting of a mirror mounted so that it turns on an axis parallel to the Earth's. Clockwork drives it west as the Earth turns east; it reflects a constant image into a stationary telescope.

Comet—a hazy cloud of gas with a bright nucleus and a faint tail, moving under the Sun's attraction in a highly eccentric orbit.

Conjunction—any body in line with the Earth and the Sun is in conjunction. On the near

side it is in inferior conjunction, on the far side it is in superior conjunction. In the opposite direction to the Sun, it is in opposition.

Continuum—an intermingling series of continuous components. The three space dimensions and the time dimension are continuous components intermingling to form the four-dimensional continuum.

Cosmic dust—tiny particles of matter up to a hundredth of a millimeter spread out through space.

Cosmic rays—energetic charged particles colliding with the Earth from outer space. Mostly protons, but also some electrons and a few heavy atomic nuclei—up to the atomic weight of iron.

Cosmic static—long-wave radio emissions coming from extended regions of the Milky Way. Not observable beyond 30 degrees either side of the Milky Way, and most intense in Sagittarius.

Cosmogony—theories about the origin of celestial bodies.

Crab nebula—exploding remains of a supernova that was observed by Chinese astronomers in A.D. 1054. Still expanding at the rate of many hundred miles a second. The star it came from had a luminosity equivalent to 30 million of our Suns!

Cybernetics—the study of communication and control mechanisms in machines and living things. The science of the relationships between the central control, the peripheral effectors and the channels between.

H.J.C.

Forrest J. Ackerman

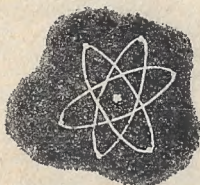
writes from America . . .

Straight from the producer's mouthpiece: the publicity department at Paramount Studio has let me know in advance that George Pal will produce **AFTER WORLDS COLLIDE** when he has completed **WAR OF THE WORLDS**. This Wellsian classic has been modernised, with the action now taking place in California rather than English countryside. Wait till you see (in Technicolor) the Striding Terrors as they surge over hill and dale on nega-magnetic columns of solidified light!

Wendayne (my scientifanne wife) met an actor recently who had been *disintegrated* in one sequence. He described how he recklessly rushed one of the Martian war-machines, and was first paralysed by a ray from its hissing, cobra-like striking arm, then had his brain heated to incandescence, and finally was completely volatilised. A million and a half dollars is being expended on this super scientifilm, which has a shooting schedule of 200 days!

I am preparing an anthology to feature *fifty* short stories with the title **COMING ATTRACTIONS**. A fabulous number of collections and novels is scheduled for spring and summer publication in the U.S.A., among the titles being **IMAGINATION UNLIMITED**, **THE CARNIVAL OF SCIENCE FICTION** (the first all-humorous selection), **THE GREAT BOOK OF**

SCIENCE FICTION, **THE HAPLOIDS**, **THE LONG, LOUD SILENCE**, **FIVE SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS** and **EARTH-BOUND**.



On March 1st close to half a hundred authors and fans in the Greater Los Angeles area attended a banquet in honour of fellow writer L. Major Reynolds, most literarily successful fan of the previous year risen from the ranks of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. The many personages present included A. E. van Vogt, Sylvia Jacobs, Rick Sneary, E. Mayne Hull, John Campbell, Frank Quattrochi and Dorothea Faulkner.

A whole rash of new science fiction magazines is on the Stateside horizon, but they will constitute no competition to your favourite *Authentic Science Fiction*.

Flash! An unpublished sequel to Victor Rousseau's classic **APOSTLE OF THE CYLINDER** has been discovered, entitled **THIS ENGLAND!**

4sJ

Read Forrest J. Ackerman on this page every month.

MICE OR MACHINES

By H. J. Campbell

“ Mice or machines, it’s all the same, women hate them.”

—Anapolitos.

The young woman in the dark-brown suit stepped out briskly beside her male companion and glanced interestedly at the game of robotcricket that was being played on the green across the way. The man, flicking a speck of dust from his bright maroon jacket and with a quick peek at his lemon-yellow trousers, urged the woman to move faster—towards the little crowd of men and women a short way in front of them.

As they came up with the crowd, the young woman jerked her gaze away from the cricket and listened to the indignant exclamations that were coming from the crowd.

“ I didn’t expect to find it happening in our town,” one haughty feminine voice said.

“ It’s time the police put a stop to it,” vowed another.

“ This is utterly disgraceful!” a dowager commented.

“ I won’t stop here another minute!”

The young woman in the brown suit craned her neck to see the cause of these outbursts. Suddenly she stiffened and drew back, pulling the man with her.

“ Let’s get away from here, Henry,” she said quickly.

“ We don’t want to be involved in this!”

As she dragged him away from the crowd the man looked back, his interest aroused. What he saw made a glimmer of a smile appear on his face. He quickly wiped it off and followed his wife.

Behind him, the crowd continued to exclaim. The object of their wrath stood silent and gleaming in the sunlight—a brand new cigarette machine.

CHAPTER ONE

Petition

HOME SECRETARY Heln Votroi tapped out the last few letters on her Report on Employment Diversions and then pulled the little lever that lowered the typeprinter out of sight. She pressed one of the two dozen or so buttons on the panel at the side of her desk. A mirror popped up in response. After a quick glance in the polished metal, Heln let it slide back into its concealed slot. She sighed. Her superiors and subordinates would be amazed if they knew she was thinking how much nicer she would look with a few curls.

Going over to a cabinet, she switched on the diary for the day. The little clock above the screen showed 14.00 hours. The diary showed an engagement for 14.30. Time for a little relaxation, she thought.

Before switching off the screen, she gazed for a while at the faces shown there—the men who would be pleading with her in half an hour. Most of them were nondescript, negative kind of men, but one of them stood out from the rest by virtue of his eager features and light-loving eyes. Heln twisted the magnifier knob and brought his face up to almost full size. She sighed. Lon Aro was indeed a handsome man. If only he did not belong to that crazy sect . . .

She switched off and the photographs faded instantly from view.

Relaxation, she remembered. Through her office door and into the next room. There she stretched out on a yielding couch, pulled over a lever. To the "sea-shore" notch.

The hiss of breakers swept into the room. An aromatic perfume of iodine, seaweed and shellfish permeated the air. The ceiling turned blue and appeared limitless; a white-grey cloud drifted across it. Her fingers, drooping down beside

the couch, sifted sand. Dry, warm sand. Over the sound of the waves came a shrill, belligerent screeching. Gulls.

Heln, her eyes closed, her fingers idling with the sand, breathed deeply. And her breast rose high, filled with the intoxicating atmosphere of the sea-shore. She lay motionless, just breathing. Hardly thinking.

It was the bell that brought her back. Its harsh note, designed for occasions such as this, dissolved the hiss, the aroma and the screeching almost before she had pulled the lever back. Shuddering, she got up from the couch and went back to her office. Turned off the bell. Told them to send in the men. She sat erect behind her desk, right back to the present now. And waited.

A moment or two later the pilot lamp on her desk winked redly at her twice. She swept a hand across the photolock control and looked up as the door opened. The men trooped in.

Heln steeled herself not to blink at the brilliant hues that came through the door, like prismatic auras in which the men had somehow got caught up. Reds, yellows, greens, violets and one or two colours the spectrum had never seen. The men, she could see, were fashionably dressed. Except perhaps Lon Aro. He wore a bright blue ensemble, but it was at least only one colour. His shoes, shirt and tie were blue, too.

Heln stood up and smoothed her severely functional tunic of grey. "You will sit with me?" she asked.

Without waiting for their reply—it was a rhetorical question anyway—she pressed a few more buttons. Five chairs shot out of the wall and arranged themselves in a semi-circle in front of her desk. The men sat down.

"Drink?" Heln said. A robotwaiter rolled through another wall and came to a stop in front of the men. On its upper shelf were old-fashioned glasses and bottles. On its lower shelf were boxes of perfumed cigarettes. "Help yourselves," she told them.

All except Lon Aro shook their heads politely. Lon grinned and leaned forward, pouring out two long rums, one of which he passed onto Heln's desk. He glanced at the boxes of cigarettes and wrinkled his nose.

"Have one of mine," he said, and offered his cigar case.

Heln looked suitably surprised and slightly put out, but nevertheless she took a cigar and gave Lon a light. The other men remained silent until the amenities had been settled. Then one of them placed a bulky package on Heln's desk and asked if he might open it.

Mindful of her official position and the sacrosanctity of her desk, Heln raised her eyebrows. "That will depend, of course," she said, "on what is inside the package."

"It is a machine for——" the poor little man began. But Heln cut him off.

"A machine! You should know better, sir, than to bring it here. I cannot allow you to open that package."

"But I thought you knew," the little man fumbled. "I thought it had been reported. I thought——"

Again Heln broke in. "Of course I knew the purpose of your coming here. I saw it on the diary screen just half an hour ago. But I didn't expect you to bring a machine with you! However, I will agree to overlook the matter. If you will kindly remove the hideous thing from my desk, we can discuss your plea forthwith—though I warn you that my instructions are to . . . to . . ."

She broke off as she caught the gaze of Lon Aro, quiet smiling and, since she was the Home Secretary, a trifle insolent! By trying very hard she managed to convert the resultant blush into a very pale and very becoming pink glow. She knew just what he was thinking and how pompous she had sounded.

"Look, Miss Votroi," Lon drawled. "I don't think we ought to get steamified about this. If, in bringing the machine here, we have offended you, I'm sure we all apologise most profusely. In fact, we're darn sorry! Let me take it off your desk for you!"

The way he said it made her feel as though he were the Home Secretary and she the petitioner. How ridiculous! A *man* Home Secretary! But the quiet little voice told her maybe *she* was being a little ridiculous. Still, there were those instructions . . .

Lon deftly removed the package from her desk, grinned

at his nervous-looking companions and turned back to Heln. She braced herself—and came very near to hating him.

“Madam Home Secretary,” said Lon with that faint smile still there. “As your diary screen probably told you, we are here to petition the Government on behalf of the Scientific Mechanics. We wish the Government to examine for itself the possibilities of this machine—and to come to the inevitable conclusion that such machines could prove invaluable in the handling of State affairs.”

Heln’s eyes narrowed a little. Perhaps she could shake his calm with hints at treason.

“You are dissatisfied with the Government’s handling of State affairs?” she asked.

Lon’s smile broadened. “That is not part of this petition. My personal feelings are subjugated to the instructions I have received from Scientific Mechanics.”

If she had been alone she might have bitten her lip. But then, if she had been alone she wouldn’t have had to.

She sneaked a quick glance at the package on the floor. Her instructions were quite clear; there was no need to prolong the meeting. But——

“What kind of machine is it?” she asked.

Lon let his eyes slowly and dramatically slew round to the parcel. His face became serious—too serious. His voice took on a kind of echo as though he was intoning Shakespeare in the way that Shakespeare never intended.

“That machine,” he said slowly, “can add, subtract, divide, multiply, factorise, integrate, differentiate, solve quadratics, extend the binomial theorem, have a bash at Euclid, make a meal of Einstein——”

Heln caught the tremor in his voice as the amusement crept back into it. “In fact,” she interrupted. “It’s an electronic brain?”

“Precisely!” Lon exclaimed, as though her depth of perception was only surpassed by her lucidity of expression. He brought his eyes back to her and somehow they had lost their amused glint. “This machine is an electronic brain. We have perfected it in the secrecy of Scientific Mechanic’s laboratories—mindful, of course, that it is illegal to exhibit machines in public without a permit. A great

deal of effort and ability has been put into its construction, a good deal of expense. That was done not merely to satisfy the irrevocable craving of the Scientific Mechanics for physical experiments. It was done in the sincere desire to make a contribution to the State's well-being. We believe our Society can better take its rightful place in the world with the help of this machine."

He sat back and drew on his cigar. Heln casually knocked the ash off hers in defiance of custom. She stared at him levelly.

"Mister Aro, when the Government recognised the right of Scientific Mechanics to indulge their emotional drives in private and granted them permission to build machines, it was not realised that this would result in an attack on the Government. Your petition may well cause the privilege to be revoked!"

All the men except Lon stammered out weak protests that this was not an attack on the Government—that the loss of their privilege would be disastrous for them. Lon merely returned her stare. Then, when the others had quietened, he spoke again.

"The Government could consolidate its position with the people by improving its administrative capabilities," he said. "The machine is for the Government's benefit."

"The Government's view, as you are well aware," Heln accused, "is that intuition forms the best basis for administration. Several centuries ago, when women took over the running of this society, it was decided unanimously that machines were the cause of a good deal of slackness on the part of the previous male rulers. The Government came to the firm decision that machines should be outlawed wherever they were used for collecting, collating or interpreting information."

Lon dropped his eyes—to the silent robotwaiter that stood between them; lifted his gaze towards the panel of buttons on her desk, let it drift to the photolock control.

Heln felt a warm flush spreading over her again. She decided not to ignore the challenge implicit in his gaze.

"That was for all administration purposes. It was then realised that as the law stood people could take a machine

that was not intended for informative work and make it function in that manner. A further law was made outlawing all machines except those expressly licensed by the Government—and the Government considered that the majority of people were not suitable to be allowed the use of machines. In Government service, of course, it is quite safe for machines to be used."

Lon nodded. "That explains why not one home in a million has the benefit of devices such as these robotwaiters, push-button controls and photolocks—why everyone must work for very long hours to make up for the lack of machines."

"We couldn't let production drop or the amenities fail," Heln retorted.

Lon ignored the remark. "How can the Government feel that intuition is best when their intuition led them to buy a thousand million tons of defective steel recently?" he asked softly.

Heln bridled. "How were we to know the steel contained too much boron?" she flared.

"The machine would have known."

"Exactly!" Heln crowed, feeling she had made her point. "The machine comes into its own only under abnormal circumstances. This steel business you've raked up was an abnormality."

The men fidgeted uncomfortably. Lon sighed.

"Madam," he said with restraint. "Doesn't the Government realise that every society is an abnormality—that by its very nature, society is unnatural? The abnormality of the steel business cost the taxpayers a good many millions of pounds."

"That was exceptional," Heln said tartly. "Our society is normal enough most of the time."

Lon forgot himself for the moment. "But don't you see, Heln, these machines would be right *all* the time. Just one mistake can rock our society's economic system and ruin us. It could put us right into the hands of the Techs."

Heln sat stiffly unmoving. The fact that he had used her Christian name in front of these other men was bad enough. That he should follow it with the hypothesis that the

Government might play the society into Tech hands by incompetence was outrageous!

A quiver passed over her at the thought. She could imagine the Techs gloating over an economic disruption and stepping in with their infernal mechanised civilisation. Over-running her society, destroying all the good work the Government had done, ruining the minds of the people, creating unemployment for countless millions, filling the homes with labour-saving devices and sapping the moral strength of the population.

That's what the Government said the Techs would do.

And yet—and yet . . . She felt the whole basic structure of her existence slipping. There might be something in what he said. But if there were, then the Government was wrong, society was wrong, the laws and lives of the people were wrong. It couldn't be!

To save her sanity Heln took a firm hold on the doctrines which had been instilled in her by the Prime Minister. That woman's words were running through her mind as Heln faced Lon squarely and placed both hands flat on her desk.

"What you have said could well be construed as treason, Mister Aro; and the penalty for that is—you know it well. However, in the light of your obvious sincerity and that of your companions, I will overlook it for the present. But if there is any recurrence of this subversive activity, I shall remember your recent words."

She felt a little foolish speaking so ponderously with Lon's gently smiling eyes on her. But she clenched her fists and carried on.

"My instructions are quite clear, gentlemen. The Government has considered the draft of your petition, and I am instructed to tell you that the Prime Minister refuses to consider your request. She reiterates her policy of no machines for collecting, collating or interpreting information. The Prime Minister does not like machines, gentlemen. Neither do I. Good day!"

The men stood up, looking beaten, but with a strength to them that showed they had been beaten before—and refused to accept it. Formally they thanked her for her attention and began a colourful troop through the door.

Lon stooped and picked up the machine, still in its wrappings. As he turned away from her desk, he dropped a small piece of paper in front of Heln, then turned and was gone with the others.

Heln picked it up and read it. It said: ROMA'S—EIGHT O'CLOCK.

CHAPTER TWO

Illicit Machines

THE Prime Minister's sharp-featured face pored over the last sheet of the Revised Regulations, then she straightened up, put her signature to the document with a flourish of her old-fashioned quill pen and rose from her seat.

Her grey head bobbing, she strode purposefully across her severe office with the papers in one hand and a thin booklet in the other. Ignoring the wall chute that in another age had carried such documents through to the Prime Minister's secretary, she passed through the door, walked down a corridor and went into another office. There, a young man was tapping at a typewriter.

The Prime Minister wrinkled her nose in distaste and went across to the man's desk. "File these, Roberts," she commanded. "And see that a copy gets to the Foreign Minister."

She stared irritably at the typewriter. "Does that thing really help you to write faster, Roberts?" she asked.

The young secretary looked up with a half-concealed smile—fully familiar with the Prime Minister's aversion to machines of any kind.

"Not only faster, but more legibly, Prime Minister," he replied. "It's so easy to mistranscribe longhand."

The Prime Minister shrugged frumpishly. "I'm not aware that any of *my* longhand can be mistranscribed. Your elementary education must have been deplorably neglected if you cannot write fast and clearly with a normal pen. I shall raise the subject with the Minister of Education; we don't want this generation to grow up unable to sign their names! Send out the call for 15.15. A full Cabinet meeting."

Blind to the young man's subtle smile, the Prime Minister turned and left the room, still carrying the slim booklet. She made her majestic way to her private room, a place almost as severe as her office. There she placed herself in a hard chair by the window and flicked through the pages of the booklet. As she did so, a frown deepened on her caustic features.

The door had been closed behind the men for at least fifteen minutes, but still Heln Votroi sat and stared at it. The thoughts had been racing through her mind even before the door had closed. The questions had been rearing up like tokens of impending doom.

Should she hand in her resignation? Was she really fitted to be Home Secretary? Or to hold *any* post in the Government? Was she, indeed, really entitled to call herself a woman? Did these ideas and doubts come to all of them, Government women and the others?

Perhaps she was just being foolish when she worried about them. Maybe they didn't matter so long as she did her job properly and no one suspected. But *did* she do her job properly? Did no one suspect? The Prime Minister had been giving her some queer looks lately. But even that might be imagination.

Heln sighed and popped her desk mirror out again. Looking into it, she had to admit that her appearance *was* rather different from that of the other Government women. Most of them closely resembled the Prime Minister, with spinsterish asceticism, haughty disdain and frumpishness showing in their cold eyes and tight faces. In Heln's case, though, the eyes were warm and brown, the features smooth and softly moulded under live hair that looked a little forlorn in its straightness.

Perhaps she should go to a plastisurgeon and have her features altered, brought more into line with her Cabinet confrères. She shuddered at the thought and let the mirror slide back.

Just as it did so, the voice of Roberts rolled through the wall-speaker, calling her to a full Cabinet meeting at 15.15. She glanced at the clock. 15.12. There were just

three minutes for her to get down to the Meeting Room. And if she were late, she could just imagine what the Prime Minister would say . . .

Snatching up a portable printwriter and quickly checking its roll of paper, Heln hurried from the room. She took the lift to the ground level. As she stepped from it, she came face to face with the Prime Minister—who had walked down the stairs. The Prime Minister gave the lift a meaningful glance and proceeded on her way into the Meeting Room.

Several of the Cabinet members were already seated there. They ceased chattering and stood up as the Prime Minister came in. Heln hurried round to her seat, a little apprehensive as to the purpose of the hastily called meeting.

The Prime Minister sat down and the others followed her example. She opened the mahogany box in front of her and took out a long cigar. This she lit with a flint arrangement, spurning the ray-lighters that the others used. When the cigar was burning to her satisfaction she began to speak, her harsh voice bouncing about the cold, austere room.

"Something must be done! We shall be lacking in our sense of duty to society if we allow this kind of thing to continue any longer. We are met here to consider ways and means of stamping out this insolent, treasonous practice!"

She assumed they all knew to what she was referring, as indeed they did. There were only two main problems the Government ever considered worthy of its attentions—the rest were delegated to junior ministers and secretaries. One problem was the continuous jabbing assault by the Techs; the other was the problem of the illicit machines. The Cabinet knew it was the latter that was under discussion.

The Prime Minister drew the slim booklet from a pocket in her severe suit and placed it on the table before her. The word "secret" shone in gold under the lamps.

"I've just been running through this list of illicit machine placements," she explained. "The number is growing alarmingly. It is probable that there are over three thousand now in existence, whereas six months ago there were only a few dozen. They range from simple cigarette and weighing machines to complicated fortune-telling devices

and games of pseudo-skill where 'lites' come on with various scores. There are also a few that apparently give a short and somewhat indecent film show in return for the coin inserted."

"Are they really used by the public?" asked a member.

"Indeed they are," the Prime Minister asserted. "Our agents have observed hundreds of people making use of the machines. It's demoralising!"

The member who had spoken looked bright. "Can't we issue special marked coins and trace the users that way?"

The Prime Minister sniffed, as did a number of the others. "The scheme is impractical," she commented. "Besides, it is not the users of these machines we wish to catch—that would mean millions of prosecutions. We have to find and destroy the people who are making and erecting the machines!"

There was silence in the Meeting Room. An operation of such complexity had never been required of the women before. Somehow it seemed obvious to all of them that intuition didn't help much in a case like this one.

"Maybe we could set a trap," one thin, bespectacled woman suggested. "Have some policewomen in hiding. Then, when they come to set up the machine, the police could pounce on them and catch them redhanded."

Once again there were audible sniffs and the Prime Minister looked pityingly at the speaker. "And where would you set these traps?" she asked.

The thin woman stammered. "Why—I mean we could—well, don't they choose certain places for their machines?"

The Prime Minister glanced unnecessarily at the slim booklet. "As it happens, they do, more or less. So far no machines have been erected in cathedrals, museums or women's cloakrooms. They have all been put up at street corners or against blank walls. *But we can't set traps at every street corner and blank wall!*"

The thin woman subsided completely. "No," she murmured. "No, of course not."

The Prime Minister collected the attention of the meeting. "It seems to me, ladies, we can do nothing before

the machines have been erected. Whatever our course of action, it must be geared to the state where these machines are in existence. Now, I have studied this matter pretty thoroughly and I think I know the answer. The rest of you don't seem to have any idea, so I'll explain mine."

She paused while the members rustled expectantly.

"The machines are slot-machines," the Prime Minister explained, though all her audience knew it. "In that case it seems reasonable to expect that whoever erected them will return periodically to collect the money in the boxes."

A murmur ran through the members and they glanced at each other. The Prime Minister preened herself a little.

"I see the feasibility of the idea strikes you," she continued. "Now, I know from the entries in this booklet which machines were erected first. I imagine they will also be the first to be emptied. If we set a watch *on them*, we ought to catch someone connected with the makers!"

A wave of polite approval passed across the audience. They nodded to each other as though they understood the full implications of the idea. Heln Votroi had been busily taking down the conversation on her printwriter for future reference. She looked up now and questioned the Prime Minister.

"How many machines were you thinking of watching?"

The Prime Minister, who obviously had not given the matter any thought, looked at Heln with annoyance—which increased perceptibly when she caught sight of the printwriter.

"Please put that infernal machine away, Home Secretary! It is bad enough having to allow members of the Government the use of mechanical devices anyway, but when they bring them into the Meeting Room—well!"

Several of the Home Secretary's juniors sniggered at the rebuke. Heln merely put the printwriter away in a pocket without change of expression, though she was quaking within.

"I asked how many because the police forces are pretty fully committed at the moment," she explained. "The Tech infiltration is taking up practically all their time."

The Prime Minister brushed the objection aside. "This

is more important," she asserted. "The police must be reorganised"—she sent Heln a piercing glance—"are you quite sure you are capable of doing that, Home Secretary?"

Heln flushed a little, torn by secret doubts, but she answered bravely enough. "Yes, Prime Minister. Quite sure."

"Very well, then. Do it. You may take this booklet and decide for yourself which machines to watch—but make sure you watch the right ones. We don't want our police-women's time wasted. I shall expect a report within a week; if no one has been caught by then, we shall obviously need a change of watches—and possibly a change of Home Secretary. Now, any other business?"

Once again Heln was tempted to speak, but again she could see that the Prime Minister would not entertain a discussion of the Tech infiltration. While that worthy woman applied herself diligently to the problems of an increased fabric output, a slump in the cosmetic trade and an inexplicable deficit in the Treasury, Heln withdrew her mind from the meeting and let it dwell once more on the Tech problem.

As Home Secretary it was definitely her business, but surprisingly enough it was about the only aspect of her duties that the Prime Minister did not keep chivvying her about. As far as the Prime Minister was concerned, there might not be a Tech problem at all! She was always postponing conferences on the subject, always refusing to allow special measures to be taken, and never once making a concrete contribution to the ceaseless war against the Techs.

Heln Votroi was pretty certain the problem was too subtle for the Prime Minister, that she didn't really understand what was going on. And there was some excuse, for the problem was indeed subtle.

The Techs, living on the other side of the world, had split themselves off ideologically way back in the 1980's just about when the women took over. The Tech Society still remained a patriarchy, but that was not the most important difference. More fundamental was the fact that

the Tech had pledged themselves to the Machine. They refused to renounce mechanics and did the reverse—making physicists and engineers the most honoured of their menfolk.

By the 1980's humanity had finally perceived the futility of armed conflict. The leaders now realised that political aims could best be attained by persuasion, so that the conquered people didn't know they were conquered because they believed in the New Order. Propaganda took the place of plutonium. Broadcasting was a substitute for bombs.

From the very beginning, the Techs had wanted more territory, greater trading possibilities. From the beginning there had been war. Probably the worst war that had ever been fought, for it was still raging after several centuries and was still claiming its victims daily. Only—these victims did not die, were not wounded. But—according to the Government—their moral strength was being sapped. They were losing sight of the grand non-mechanical objectives at the root of their society and coming round to the view that machines made life merrier.

The victims of this encroaching tide of propaganda began to feel that honest toil for sixteen hours a day did not compare favourably with the reports that came from the Techs. There, the people worked two hours a day—with the aid of machines, too. At their homes they had a multiplicity of gadgets for performing tasks. In the streets they had machines to carry them instead of their feet. They even had devices that would raise a man up in the air and carry him like a bird over the rooftops and above the mountains.

The Tech people could travel on the sea. They could dig by machine, bore by machine, use machines for talking to each other over long distances and for having entertainment in their own homes, instead of only at the Women's Guilds.

All this the Techs had told Heln's people by means of slogans dragged behind their aircraft, by leaflets dropped from the planes, by pamphlets inside goods packages, and—worst of all—at secret meetings, where photographs in support of the claims were produced.

Heln knew all this through the secret-service agents who managed to get to the meetings and to find the pamphlets. But there seemed to be nothing she could do. It was impossible to arrest the speakers at the secret meetings; they had committed no crime and were the subjects of a foreign State. She could take no reasonable action against the slogans and the pamphlets. It was essential to her society that trade with the Techs continue. She could not afford to break friendly relations; her State would be bankrupt within a year.

She was practically limited to using counter active propaganda. To putting out leaflets, arranging lectures, seeing that suitable films were made at the Government studios, making sure that every programme put out by the State Broadcasting System contained a reference to the joy of labour and the infernality of machines.

But she knew that her propaganda was having little effect. The Information Minister was doing her best to co-operate, but it was not good enough. There was something so much more thrilling in hearing about a machine that would wake you up in the morning with a cup of tea and the radio playing soft melodies, than about the salutary effect of housewifery on the soul.

Heln had to admit that the men among the Techs seemed to be going about things in a way that appealed to the majority of tastes—even after centuries of indoctrination. If the Tech propaganda were true—and Heln was pretty sure in her heart that it was—their people seemed a good deal more content than hers.

It was indeed a problem. In her imagination she could see her society crumbling away under the insidious growth of Tech teachings.

Yet—as she saw by looking up and coming out of her reverie—the Prime Minister was saying that there was no need for more football fields; strong measures must be taken against any contractor who prepared one without a permit. And no permits were to be issued!

Football fields, face powder, furs! Heln sighed.

Very soon, the Prime Minister broke up the meeting as

she had an appointment with a chiropodist. The members filed out, their faces alight with looks of accomplishment. It was obvious that they felt they had really done something at the meeting, really earned the salaries they pulled down. They glowed like evangelists after a conversion. All except Heln.

Heln just sighed.

CHAPTER THREE

Machines for Men

LON ARO smiled at the policewoman on the gates and showed his pass. The woman smiled in return and stepped aside. Lon Aro walked into the forecourt of the building which had been set aside for the use of the Scientific Mechanics.

Officially a very small, very select band, the Scientific Mechanics had all been put through the most gruelling emotional tests until the women were satisfied they needed to experiment mechanically in order to retain their mental stability. They had been granted the right to carry out these experiments in the building allotted to them, but in no other place. The building was heavily guarded, and each Mechanic had a special pass without which he would not be allowed into the building. In addition, the Mechanics were periodically tested for their loyalty index—to see if they were moving towards the Tech idea of society.

So far not one Mechanic had failed a loyalty test. Each time, the women were satisfied that the Mechanics' interest in physics was purely academic and unrelated to ordinary life—or, as the Government women put it, scientific. They remained in peace—on sufferance.

Lon Aro quickly covered the few yards of forecourt and mounted the short flight of steps into the building. He pushed aside the swing door and strode purposefully across the hall to the main laboratory, conscious all the time that Government scanners were beamed upon him from the walls. The scanners had been discovered very early on, as soon as the Mechanics moved in, in fact. Lon had been suspicious from the first time he learned that the Government was erecting the building for the Mechanics. He had instituted a thorough, but apparently casual, search the day the Mechanics took over. He was confident he knew all the Government tricks by now.

In the main laboratory he met a couple of Mechanics at work on the benches. They looked up, noted he was alone and asked about the others.

"They went straight home," Lon explained. "The results of the meeting were too much for them."

"What happened?" one of the men wanted to know.

Lon recounted the course of the interview with the Home Secretary, embroidering it a little for the benefit of the scanners. The conversation continued for a few moments in a desultory sort of way then petered out. Turning his back to where he knew the scanner was, Lon picked up a test-tube and poured some permanganate solution into it. Then he took down a reagent bottle of hydrogen peroxide and added some of that. The dark red liquid turned colourless.

Lon stared at the tube for a short time, shook it, then replaced it in the rack and walked out. The others, who had been watching him from the corner of their eyes, waited a while and then passed through into the smaller laboratories leading off the main one. Each of them went and stood near another man, engaging him in innocent conversation while they repeated the decolourisation experiment that Lon had performed. The process continued, throughout all the laboratories in the building. But in no case did anyone mention the business with the test-tubes.

After leaving the main laboratory, Lon walked casually into his private room. There he pottered about for a while, letting the scanners see his every movement. Then he removed his outer clothing and climbed onto a couch. Reaching up, he pulled a ring set in the wall at the side of the bed. An opaque screen came out of the wall blind-wise and curved down to the outer edge of the couch. Under it, Lon smiled to himself. The scanner would automatically assume that he was going to sleep—with the screen as a protection against noise; he had already explained its purpose to his colleagues several times for the benefit of the scanners.

Immediately the screen was locked in place at the edge of the bed, Lon turned over on the couch and pulled on a

coverall hidden under the sheets. Then he pressed a section of the wall. The couch began to sink.

From the gloom under the screen, the sinking couch took him into a brightly lit room and set him down near the floor. There were several men in the room, all of whom remained silent until Lon had pressed another button and the couch had risen back into its place, preventing any sound waves travelling up into Lon's private room. Then they began to talk all at once. Lon laughed and held up his hand.

"Come, come, this is most unscientific!" he exclaimed. "We must have decorum. Let's sit down to begin with."

The men, summoned on a rota system by the permanent sign, pulled up their chairs around Lon and watched him eagerly—knowing that here they could talk freely. There were no scanners in this room. The Mechanics had constructed it themselves.

"Well, now," Lon began. "It's all very disappointing. Our meeting with the Home Secretary was a failure. The Government is against any use of machines for the kind of things *we* think they ought to be used for. So that's *that*. I don't think there's any point in going further with that idea for the present. It was a good idea, of course"—he hastened to assure the man whose idea it had been—"but not quite suitable for the present position. Later maybe."

"What do we do now, then?" an eager young man asked. "Surely we don't sit back and take it!"

"That's exactly what we do do—officially," Lon claimed. "Unofficially—well, we go ahead with the illicit placings."

At this, one of the men jumped up and down excitedly. He was an old man compared with the others and anyone could see he was passionately devoted to the cause. His bald pate and wrinkled face compared oddly with Lon's luxuriant black mop and his clean, fresh features. The old man obviously wanted to speak but didn't like to interrupt Lon. Lon grinned at him.

"Got something up your sleeve, old-timer?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," the old man broke out rapidly. "At least—I think I have. Something that would make the illicit

placings a good deal easier and more effective. Of course, I don't know whether you will agree upon the psychological propensities of——"

"We'll get down to that later," Lon interrupted kindly. "Just let's have the basic idea now."

The old man blinked at everybody as though wondering whether he was going to make a fool of himself. Then, he seemed to decide that it didn't matter anyway and launched into his speech.

"Well, I looked at it like this. The basic idea of placing these machines is to make the people machine-minded and to overthrow the emotional-intuitive rule of the women. Now, as with all societies, the biggest group of our people in our society is the lower middle-class and the working-class—although, of course, everybody works these days. But I maintain that these are *not* the people who will effect our aims. Oh, we must cater for them by all means, but only as a side-issue. It is the higher middle-class and upper-class people who can bring about the changes we want, by the effect of their actions on the voting attitude of the majority. We can get where we want only by influencing these—well, intelligentsia, if you like. And we won't do that with cigarette machines, weighing machines or machines that show—ah—questionable films."

The old man waited, staring like an owl at Lon. There was a murmur among the gathered company. Lon smiled as he realised the old man had given him the psychological angle first after all.

"A masterful analysis, Jeb," he said in all sincerity. "I think you are perfectly right. But—*how* are we to influence the—er—the intelligentsia?"

"I was coming to that," old Jeb started again. "The intelligentsia, as you know, have been agitating mildly for a long time against the practice of booksellers stocking only State editions of the classics. They don't *do* much, but they *feel* quite strongly about it. They say their intellectual heritage is being stolen from them—though, of course, they also realise that much of the classics would make this Society look pretty futile! But they think they are strong enough to overcome that."

The men began to fidget. Most of them were plain craftsmen and this was boring them. They would have preferred a straightforward account of what old Jeb proposed to do without bothering about his reasons for doing it. One or two of them started to say something to that effect but Lon stayed them with a gesture.

"Try to spit it out short, Jeb," was all he said.

"It seems to me we can make a few alterations to our teleportation machine with which we collect the money from the slot machines, so that it could place the new machines inside individual houses. We can easily find the addresses of the intelligentsia and then—oh, by the way, the new machine would be a book-vendor. In return for their coins, the users receive a copy of one of the classics—printed by us in its original version."

This time when the old man stopped there was a buzz of approval. His idea seemed to fit the bill. Lon beamed at Jeb.

"Brilliant!" he exclaimed. "Not only do we get the machines into their homes just by turning a few knobs here and there, but we feed them what, in these circumstances, is subversive propaganda! Right into their minds! Jeb, you're wonderful!" Lon didn't want to voice an objection right away—how were they going to get hold of the original classics?

Old Jeb glowed with pleasure at the praise bestowed on him by Lon, and eagerly shook the hands of the other men who unquestionably accepted his idea.

"If you like to come along to the workshop," he suggested in a series of gasps, "I've got a model all ready to show you."

Thinking to humour the man by going to see his book-vendor, although there was not much point in seeing the machine only at this stage, Lon gathered the company about him and followed the old man through the door into the underground workshop—also scanner-less.

The workshop covered the entire area beneath the building except for that occupied by the room they had just left. Down its centre ran two long lines of massive machine tools. At each end there was a powerful electric

furnace. Dotted about the open spaces were sturdy metal benches, each equipped with a variety of small tools.

In effect, it was a miniature factory, or group of factories, for practically any industrial process could be carried out there on a small scale. The laboratories up above, the ones the Government knew about, were well equipped, but this underground workshop was better by a thousand times.

Jeb led the party across to the bench that had been reserved for him. Standing on it with its back towards them was a cuboid metal cabinet—obviously the book-vendor. Lon stifled his impatience and strode forward as though he expected to see something more than a new design for a fundamentally conventional slot machine. And he did.

As they came round to the front, the party gave a common gasp of surprise. Not only was the book-vendor beautifully finished, but it was also full of books. Each one stood behind a little plastic panel that allowed its cover and title to be seen. At the side of each book was a separate slot and when Jeb slipped a coin into one and pulled on a lever, the book selected slid smoothly into a chute and appeared at the base of the machine.

Lon moved forward and scooped up the book, hastily flicking through the pages. His eyebrows rose as he saw there was no State imprint on the title page and that, as far as he could remember, the text was the original version.

He swung round on Jeb. "How the blazes did you manage this?" he asked. "I'd have said it was impossible!"

It was Jeb's turn to raise his eyebrows. "Dear me," he said, blinking rapidly. "that was the most simple part. The vendor was much more complicated and so were the adjustments to the teleporter machine."

Lon's head was in a bit of a whirl. "Adjustments—? Have you placed some of these already, then?"

Jeb looked a trifle shocked. "Oh, no, I wouldn't do that without your permission. No, I mean the adjustments I had to make to teleport the original classics from the State library."

A hush crept across the room. The State library was

perhaps the most closely guarded of all Government buildings. The penalty for an outsider being found there, whatever his reason, was the severest the State dealt out. Jeb had 'pinched' some of their books!

Lon was imagining the hue and cry that would ensue as soon as the theft was discovered. Being honest with himself, he realised he was quaking a little inside. Yet he didn't want to blurt recriminations against Jeb, who had acted with the best intentions.

"Where—where have you put the State copies," he stammered out.

"Oh, they've gone back," Jeb said, to everyone's audible relief. "I only had one at a time and copied them on the depth camera. Then I unscrambled the images at leisure. I don't suppose I had any of the books for more than a minute or two—and I took several days over the job. I wouldn't have wanted the authorities to find out."

Lon was dumbfounded. Here was this old man, quietly working in his little corner of the workshop, unnoticed by the others, and he had accomplished a major feat in the cause of all the Scientific Mechanics. Yet he had waited his turn at the meeting and put forward his idea with a good deal of diffidence.

But the shocks were not over yet.

"I also calculated the alterations in the teleporter machine necessary to shift the vendor," Jeb added. "Would you like to see a demonstration?"

Lon and the rest of the party agreed that they would, indeed. Leaving the vendor on the bench, Jeb led them across to the gigantic teleporter machine, ranged against one of the workshop walls.

"Of course," the old man explained on the way over, "the actual teleportation is very similar to that used for the ordinary slot-machine money. The difficulties came when allowing for the different densities of metal and cellulosic materials, and in making the beaming more delicate." He grinned. "We don't want our machines to materialise right in the centre of a party-wall!"

When they reached the machine, Jeb swung the massive camera hood round to face the book-vendor on the bench

ten yards away. Taking a notebook from his pocket, he consulted a page of figures and then made adjustments to the range, density, distance and magnitude controls. Placing his eye against the fine-focus lens he racked the camera back until the vendor was sharp against everything around it. Then he let in the masking screens to cut off the image of everything but the vendor.

"Stand clear!" he called.

His warning was unnecessary. No sensible Mechanic ever stood in front of the camera when someone was manipulating the teleporter machine.

Jeb moved a lever slowly along a sliding resistance, tapping a considerable current from the great generators that hummed in the far corner. Clicks came as the voltage was stepped up over an almost infinite series of spark-gaps. Then, as a dial needle reached a red mark, Jeb held the lever rigid and pressed a red button with his other hand.

There was a split-second flash as the voltage toppled down to zero, and nothing more. The vendor was no longer on the bench.

"Where have you sent it?" Lon asked.

"Only into the next room," Jeb answered. "Let's go and see if it got there whole."

The little procession moved off again, back into the meeting room. And there was the vendor, standing immaculate and complete with its books in the centre of the floor.

Suddenly the whole picture fell into place in Lon's mind. "Right," he said. "Timothy, George and Fred, you three get down to it with Jeb and work out a list of addresses. Calculate the teleporter data and have them ready for tomorrow morning. Kenneth, you go rustle up some men and get as many of these vendors turned out as you can by tomorrow. Make 'em work all night. Jeb, your work has only just begun. But, believe me, we're very, very grateful. Maybe you'll get repaid some day. Well, I must be off. Sorry to leave you chaps with the baby, but I think this might turn out important. See you all tomorrow. Machines for Men!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Men were Deceivers. . . .

ROMA'S stood back a bit from the road. The neon sign flashed disturbingly above wide, all-glass doors, alternating the name of the establishment with a slogan telling passers-by that within these portals they would find incomparable food, wine and dancing. In the current idiom the slogan read:

BEST EATS, DRINKS AND SHUFFLE GRINDERS.

Heln gave the club a sweeping glance. Lon had never met her here before. Usually they came together in quieter surroundings, places where she was not so likely to be recognised and where Lon's own peculiar hobby was considered harmlessly cranky. Here, it would be deemed outrageous. Still, Lon probably knew what he was doing.

The door opened silently as she approached and a melodious crooning welcomed her into Roma's, hoped she would enjoy her stay and would come again. A fresh waft of perfume swirled around her, obliterating all traces of food smells, making the air seem as keen and pure as on a mountain top. The crooning record played itself out while she placed her outer coat on a hook just inside a narrow slit in the wall. Then the personal record came on and informed her that Lon awaited her in the cocktail lounge.

Passing through into the crowded room, she realised that Roma's was a popular place. The cocktail lounge was packed with people who were pleasantly whiling away the short wait until a table became free for them to dine. Spirits were high, judging by the ripples of laughter that spread out from the bar. These were the contented, the near-wealthy who are so much happier than the rich because they still find joy in spending selectively.

Lon broke away from a small group of men at a table away from the bar itself and came towards her. This, among other customs, the women had retained. Men must wait—but all must work.

As usual in public, he didn't kiss her; merely pressed her hand. The kiss was in his smile, in the pressure of his fingers.

"Cocktail?" he asked. "Or we can go straight through. Our table is reserved."

"Let's do that, then," Heln suggested. "I don't particularly want a cocktail and I take it you've already had one?"

"Several," he laughed. "Sophisticated, aren't I?"

Now she took over and became the matriarch. Linking her arm in his, she led him towards the dining room, stood back for him to pass through the door, beckoned the Head Waitress.

In a moment or two they were seated. The Head Waitress hovered a second to assure herself that her patrons were comfortable and then departed, leaving the rest of the job to her minions. When the waitress came, she handed the menu to Lon, took the order from Heln. Bowing to Lon, she hastened away, disappearing through the service door into the hot chaos beyond.

"That was rather silly of you this afternoon," Heln said, as she sipped the drink brought automatically by the wine waitress. "Couldn't you have let someone else come?"

Lon raised his eyebrows. "This afternoon? Oh, yes. Well, it was such a fine opportunity to see you in your official capacity. A man should see his future wife under all possible circumstances!"

Heln put down her glass and turned away. Why did he insist on bringing up that subject? And yet if he didn't . . . she'd be . . . well, a little sad.

"You refuse to believe me, then?" she asked, staring away from him at the dancers.

"I refuse to believe ideas that have been put into your head and are not true."

She brought her troubled eyes back to him. "Don't

you see this is stupid? How could I ever marry a Scientific Mechanic?"

"Once," Lon said, "women would shift the world in its orbit so as to marry the man of their choice."

"This isn't once; it's *now*. Women have a duty to society. We can't let personal ambition come before State commitments.

Lon laughed again, breaking the tension. "I'm glad to know I'm your personal ambition!"

She flushed a little and was pleased that the waitress arrived just at that moment, with the soup. Created by the women chefs somewhere in the nether regions of Roma's, the soup was a pale pastel shade—like the first dull tints of an overcast dawn. Its flavour, Heln had to admit, was superlative; in fact it quite distracted her from the course of her conversation with Lon. They sipped in silence.

As the soup containers withered away and dropped through the decorative net of the table top into the chute below, Lon leaned across and looked Heln full in the eyes.

"Let's dance," he said. "I don't want to just sit and wait for the next course."

Heln held his gaze for a moment or two. Then the corners of her lips drooped and she nodded.

"All right. But only this once between courses!"

She stood up. Lon came up beside her and let her lead him out onto the floor. As they passed into the pool of brilliant light, they both gasped and held each other more firmly. Instantly, the light and other, invisible, rays bathed them from head to toe. Then there was darkness. Thick, unnatural darkness.

Each knew, at the far-backs of their minds, that to the people at the tables they would appear to be in full view, their bodies smoothly gliding in response to the music. But here in this darkness that was only a vague comforting thought. The surging rhythm of the muted orchestra became resonant with their own nervous rhythms. The attachments on their soles moved their legs in easy swinging movements, taking away all need for thought of the dance steps. They could give themselves up completely to the

hypnotic grace of bodily movement and close proximity in their own tiny void.

Time was something that happened outside in the world of light. Food was a necessity only for those who stayed beyond the rays. Talk was a device for cluttered minds.

Here there was the excruciating pleasure of mental co-mingling allied with perfection of physical grace.

To them, the music and the delirium reached a climax, then softly fell away. Bodies warm, motionless now, in cool air, they stood and waited for the end. It came. The rays were shifted. The lights came on. The noise came back.

The dance was over.

Not talking, they walked back to their table. Heln waited until Lon was seated, then took her place opposite him. The main course had been served. They casually flicked the heating switch on the plastic pack and waited. They looked up into each other's eyes, memory of the dance still upon them.

"Heln," Lon said, "let's not wait any more. Let's be married. Tonight. We can find a——"

Heln shuddered. The magic dropped away from her. The fever of the dance was gone, forgotten. The music was harsh, discordant, the dancers a pack of idlers.

"I've said no! I keep on saying no. It's impossible while you remain a Scientific Mechanic."

"Give up your job, Heln. You're not really a Home Secretary. They could find a better one. One who *believes* in her job. You believe in mine. It's true, Heln, isn't it?"

"No!" Heln almost shouted the word. She had to shout it. It was the only way to convince herself he was wrong. "How dare you suggest it! I *am* a Home Secretary. I *do* believe in my job. And if you must have proof, I'll give it to you!"

She rose from the table abruptly, swung on her heel and was gone, away across the dining room and through the door before Lon could open his mouth.

Lon sat and stared at the door. A few people had looked up as Heln swept out and had then gone quickly back to their own interests. He sat and stared. She wouldn't be back, he knew that. The dinner date was off. At a guess,

he'd say she had gone back to her office—to cook up some scheme that would prove to him she was a real Home Secretary. He sighed. She was so very wrong, so very wilful, so very wonderful.

An odour of fried chicken curled around his nostrils. He looked down. The pack had opened, revealing a prime leg of chicken done to a turn, surrounded by green peas, roast potatoes and a small portion of sauce.

Lot picked up his plastic prong, transferred Heln's food to his own plate and started to eat—after raising an enquiring eyebrow at the wine waitress.

The old-fashioned twentieth-century house looked quite out of place among its modern neighbours. Its grey brick walls contrasted oddly with the sheer white metallised façades on either side. Its jutting chimneys belched the anachronistic story of the house's lack of radiant heating. The front door was stolidly, solidly wooden.

Lon grimaced as he mounted the steps and pressed the archaic bell-push, waiting impatiently for the maid to open the door—thinking that perhaps the Prime Minister went a little too far in refusing to have a photolock on her front door.

At length the maid appeared and showed him into the lounge. He warmed himself before the high coal fire—reluctantly admitting that there *was* something cosy about it, though the cost must be enormous. He moved over to the window. Smiling grimly, he fingered the curtains. Cloth! Not even woven plastic. The old lady certainly was thorough!

A moment later the old lady came through the door and greeted him in a hearty if somewhat frumpish fashion.

"Well, Lon, there's a good deal to talk about. Will you sit with me? Don't take up *all* the fire!"

She settled herself comfortably in a wing chair on the other side of the fire from Lon. They made an ill-assorted pair. She, old, hatchet-faced and prim. He, young, happy-faced and easy. They looked at each other like fellow conspirators.

" Things seem to be going rather badly, Prime Minister," Lon began.

" Oh, don't be silly. Call me by my proper name," she rejoined.

" All right, Martha—though Prime Minister seems to suit you better. Anyway, it would seem that the Tech propaganda machine needs oiling."

Martha humphed. " Oil won't do any good. It wants to be taken apart and put together again—that's about the only thing that'll get the results. Really, it's most annoying! I do my best to keep this ridiculous Government away from Tech affairs, thinking to give them a free hand, and all that happens is a few leaflets distributed here and there. It won't do Lon, it won't do!"

Lon kept a tight grip on the corners of his lips—knowing how effectively he had put a stop to the other forms of Tech propaganda. Sometimes he had qualms about the way he went through life in a double-dealing fashion; it seemed a bit rough deceiving the old lady like this. But on reflection, he knew he was right.

The Prime Minister was a sham. She put on the deliberate front of hostility to machines, whereas her dearest wish was to see the Techs take over; they had already promised her a high position in the new régime. The crafty old woman's plan fitted the mood of the age. Not to encourage Tech ideas, but to prevent the people having machines by force. That way they became afflicted with a burning desire to have machines, would surreptitiously drink in the subversive Tech propaganda, and be less likely to see the weak point of the Tech system of society.

Then, when the necessary sections of society had been unconsciously indoctrinated, the collapse would be sudden and complete. The Prime Minister had already paved the way for it with her insistence on that steel deal going through, although she knew the metal was faulty. Economics was the watchword of modern war.

But Lon, even though he was a Scientific Mechanic, didn't see it that way. To him, machines were a necessary and rightful heritage of the people. They deserved more leisure, should be allowed to place the more mundane tasks

in the care of machines. The idea had been deeply rooted in his mind ever since he had stared from his playpen and watched his mother scrubbing floors—and then, when he had later gone to a Government office, seen the automatic floor-washers in action. Besides, machines could enrich society in many commercial ways. All the tasks that were now done by hand could be done more quickly, more cheaply and on a wider scale by machine. It was all there, buried in the past and locked up in the modern records of the Scientific Mechanics.

But Lon wanted the characteristics of his society to survive. He didn't want Tech rule—with its exploitation, its soullessness, its utterly commercial and mechanistic outlook. To Lon's mind, his society could flourish with the use of machines and make itself economically independent of the Techs. The Tech infiltration of ideas must be crushed. But machines would be needed to do it.

It was a difficult task, he knew that. The Prime Minister's methods were devilish in their subtlety and effectiveness. Her plan could work. The people would accept Tech social systems in order to get the machines. Only later, when the first flush of enthusiasm had worn away, would they realise the kind of bondage into which they had sold themselves. The task was difficult indeed. But he was not alone. The cult of Scientific Mechanics were all of the same mind—and the cult was very, very widespread.

"The other trouble," the Prime Minister said, "is this underground colony that's putting up the machines. If that goes on, the people won't get the maximum degree of machine-starvation. It's got to stop. Surely, you could use your position with Scientific Mechanics to do something about it? Use your machines to seek out these rats and destroy them?"

Lon sighed very convincingly. "Our Charter doesn't allow us to *use* machines, Martha. Only to make them and experiment with them. I wouldn't mind—but the rest of them don't think as I do, you know."

"I know, Lon, I know," Martha soothed. "It's a piece of fortune that I've got you on my side anyway. I mustn't

expect too much. Well, that Home Secretary of mine has got a campaign on at the moment. I've high hopes of it. She's going to set police guards on some of the machines and nab the people who come to collect the money. We'll only get the small fry, but it may lead us to the big shots in the end."

Again Lon repressed a smile. "Good," he said. "I hope she does pull something off. I believe she tries hard enough."

"Humph!" noised Martha. "I'm not sure she does—and I'm not so sure she isn't half in sympathy with them. She behaves very queerly at times. You never know who to trust these days, Lon. It's not so much a question of deliberate treason—that's unthinkable—but people's minds don't seem to work right any more."

"Maybe that's because the Government is composed only of women," Lon suggested.

"Umm, you may be right there. I wish I could have you in the Government, Lon, but of course, that's quite impossible."

"Quite," Lon agreed. "Ah, well, I guess it'll all turn out all right in the end."

"I'm sure it will," Martha said firmly. "Nothing can halt the march of progress—not for long, anyway. It's true things seemed to take a backward step when the women took over, but once we get the machines and the Techs behind us we'll be all right. Now with regard to propaganda—I've thought of having a hypnotist broadcast over the State radio, put the listeners to sleep and then feed 'em a dose of good, sound subversive propaganda! What d'you think of that?"

"Excellent!" Lon exclaimed. "Nothing could be easier. What about getting Nhuga to do it? He's a hypnotist, you know."

"I didn't know. Oh, well, he's one of our best men, and you know him too, of course. Will you fix it up for me?"

"With pleasure, Martha—and I'll write the propaganda if you like."

"No. No, I'll do that. I rather excel myself at that

kind of thing. You just fix it up with Nhuga and the radio people—can you handle them, by the way?”

“Oh, yes. It may take a little time, but I can do it. I’ve done some work for them before.”

“We can take it as settled then?”

“Definitely settled,” Lon replied, and there was now an irrepressible grin on his face.

CHAPTER FIVE

False Alarm?

LON was wrong about Heln. She didn't go to her office after leaving him at Roma's. True, she started out to go there, but at some point along the way she decided she could think better at home. She retraced her steps and ended up at her little suburban villa, where, after a quick dispirited meal, she went to bed and thought. A few hours later she reckoned she had it all worked out.

Now, in her office next morning, she pored over the slim booklet that the Prime Minister had given her—the list of machine placements.

The Prime Minister had been quite right, Heln admitted, when she said the first machines to be placed would be the first to be emptied. But there was another factor coming into it, too. Machines that were in places where plenty of people gather would be more likely to fill up with coins earlier than machines in isolated positions. Working on that basis, Heln made a list of thirty-five installations—one of them being almost certain to be emptied soon; it stood under an open air official TV screen.

She set the typeprinter at the 'duplicate 35' level and ran the list through it. Then she took each sheet and placed the name of a police inspector against one of the installations. A few moments later she was on the TV-phone to the Police Commissioner.

The dignified-looking woman, resplendent in her smart uniform, gazed out of the screen with evident apprehension. Heln had made so many demands on her force lately.

Heln smiled deceptively. "I'm relieving you of some of the anti-Tech programme," she explained. Quickly, before the look of infinite relief had time to settle itself on the Commissioner's face, Heln went on. "The officers involved will be placed on other duties. The Prime Minister is

determined to launch a heavy attack on the underground machine-placers. Here is a list of some installations."

Heln held up the lists in a flick-over rack. The Commissioner leaned down and switched on her copy-camera. The process of copying the sheets went on quietly while the women talked.

"You will see that I have chosen the officers to be in charge of each assignment," Heln continued. "I know from their past record that these women are dependable. Let us hope they produce as good results on this job."

The Commissioner smiled a little wanly. "They will at any rate be pleased to shelve the anti-Tech work. That seemed to be a dead end. As you say, let's hope they achieve better results here."

"The Prime Minister will probably interview them if they don't," Heln said ominously.

After a few more exchanges, Heln rang off. Poor Commissioner, she thought. Her job was sometimes even worse than the Home Secretary's!

Heln looked at the last-named installation on the list and smiled grimly. This was where she took a personal hand in things. She rang through to the Ministry of Works and ordered an x-ray probe to be sent round together with a coupled automatic alarm. Then she got through to her driver and told him to meet the x-ray machine, bring it round to the Home Office and hold himself ready to take her on a journey.

Twenty-five minutes later she put the finishing touches to some routine work and dropped it through the wall chute to her secretary. She left her desk, put on her outer coat and, still smiling, took the lift to the ground level.

Jon, the driver, jumped out of the glide car and held the door open for her. She climbed in and gave him the address of the official TV screen. She noted with satisfaction that the x-ray probe and alarm lay beside her on the seat.

Wait till Lon Aro heard about this little jaunt!

The car slid smoothly through the sparse, always-official traffic, past the milling pedestrians and came to a stop across the road from the screen.

As usual, a small knot of people stood on the pavement staring up at the screen. Heln glanced at it, too. She saw the unfolding of a propaganda film she had recently edited—telling the people in no uncertain terms that honest labour was a wonderful thing and that machines turn hearts and minds to iron.

Bringing her gaze lower down, Heln saw the machine. It stood against the wall immediately under the screen—an admirable position for a cigarette-vendor. Even as she watched, Heln saw a man detach himself from the crowd and, a little shame-facedly, insert a coin in the machine. But the people were too intent on the film and hardly anyone noticed him.

And there was nothing she could do. It was not illegal to buy from the machines—such legislation would have been considered far too harsh. It was not even considered bad form to use the machines. They played so small a part in each individual's life. Only when laid against society as a whole did the machines assume their menacing aspects.

Heln sighed wistfully and got out of her car. She beckoned to a nearby policewoman, who immediately recognised her and came hurrying over.

"Has Inspector Joan Line arrived yet?" Heln asked.

"Yes, madam. She has taken up a position in the building behind you, right opposite the machine."

Heln turned and nodded satisfaction. "And what are you doing here, constable? Do you know what's going on?"

"Oh, yes, madam. Inspector Line's idea is for me to stay here until I see a group eyeing me with annoyance. Then I just wander away as though on a beat and the plain-clothes officers close in as the group goes towards the machine.

"An excellent idea," Heln commented. "Well, good luck, constable—I've made a note of your number."

Expressing her thanks at this singular honour, the constable drifted back to her place. Quickly, in case the underground members turned up, Heln took the alarm from the car seat and ordered Jon to fetch the x-ray probe, carefully concealed in an innocuous-looking box. She led the

way into the building where Inspector Line was supposed to be.

Another constable met her just inside the door and directed her up to the first level. There she found the inspector, congratulated her on her promptitude and explained why she was there.

"These machine-placers are cunning, Inspector. What I intend to do is supplement your own observations by training this x-ray probe on the machine and coupling in the alarm. Then if the coins are taken from the box, the alarm will go off and we'll know. I imagine," she elaborated, "that if they get wind of this observation, they might not empty the machine at night as would be expected. Instead they'll do it in the daytime, but they'll have a bunch of people brought here specially to obstruct your view. I doubt if they'll clothe them in lead suits, so the x-ray'll go right through them!"

The inspector agreed that it seemed a good idea. She had merely provided herself with a telescopic projector so as to get a good view of the machine and its environs. Heln, aided by the inspector, set up the x-ray probe next to the telescope projector and switched on. The little screen on the x-ray device, when brought into proper focus, gave a clear picture of the machine with its tumbled mass of coins inside the coin-box.

Once the inspector's projector was rigged up nicely, presenting them with a sharp close-up of the scene across the road, they settled back in easy chairs and were soon chatting happily, finding that the difference in rank made little difference when it came to discussing cricketers' records and boxing fixtures.

Occasionally their eyes would sweep across the screen, making sure that no one was edging up to the machine, nor a particularly dense crowd forming round it. The talk drifted on. Presently, a constable came in with a tray of tea and biscuits. Heln and the Inspector ordered lunch to be brought in an hour's time.

The two women sipped their tea, munched their biscuits and chatted. Heln began to think that active police work was a good deal more pleasant than the administrative side.

And then the alarm went off.

They didn't actually drop their cups, but they came perilously near to doing so. One moment all was quiet, the next moment was composed only of the shrill screeching of the x-ray alarm.

Instinctively the inspector reached out to a button before she did anything else. She knew that the collar radios on her plain-clothes officers would buzz in response. At the same time, she saw them on the projector, closing in on the machine at her signal. And yet . . . and yet. . . . The inspector turned in consternation to Heln. The Home Secretary's eyebrows were high, her mouth a capital "O."

The projector showed that no one was near the machine except the plain-clothes officers, who stood a little dumb-founded and helpless. No one *had* gone near it, Heln could swear to that.

But the x-ray screen showed that every single coin had disappeared from the coin-box.

As Lon left Roma's and walked by devious routes to the Prime Minister's house, he passed the night shift just going on. Hundreds of thousands all over the country had left their beds in the late afternoon, had their breakfast at tea-time and were thronging through the streets on their way to their jobs.

Sixteen hours later they would cease work, go home for two hours' leisure and six hours' sleep. Then back to the job again next evening.

Lon sighed as he watched them. Even in these days of matriarchy, there was still a privilege in being an academician. Only nowadays, owing to the way the women looked at things, the academician didn't have to be even remotely useful to society. His emotional index was all that mattered. Lon realised he would be giving up a great deal when the revolution was over. . . .

His interview with the Prime Minister ended, he went straight back to the Scientific Mechanics' building, entered his private room and slept—not very soundly. When he awoke in the morning he knew he had had a number of dreams, but they were all vague and indistinct, probably

because his mind was already working on the day's problems.

After a quick wash, shave and breakfast, he went back to his room and simulated a return of tiredness. The pattern having been established, he stretched out on the couch and pulled down the screen. A moment or two later he was in the underground meeting room.

No one was there. Lon passed through into the workshop and was confronted by a scene of great activity. Against one wall, where a space had been cleared for them, stood a row of book-vendors. Two men were carrying another to join the row as Lon entered. They gave him a quick greeting and went straight back to the great infra-red drier that was the final stage in the vendor's production scheme.

Lon passed from machine to machine congratulating the men on their industry. He found old Jeb supervising the insertion of the delivery mechanism and gently led him aside. The old-timer's face was dripping with sweat and his shoulders were stooped even more than usual.

"I want you for a special job," Lon explained. "Those men can carry on now. Come over to the teleporter."

A little reluctantly, Jeb followed him, glancing back worriedly at the men who were making his invention—much as an author casts worried glances at the producer of his play.

This was about the only way to get the man to rest, Lon thought, as he sat down at the controls of the teleporter. The old man wouldn't stop work altogether, so sitting-down work was the only solution.

"Now, Jeb," Lon began, "I want you to teleport all the money in. I know it isn't the usual time, but there's a Government plan afoot to capture members of the organisation when they go to collect the money. The observers should be in position by now and I want to make them panic a little; make them realise what they are up against. Once that's done we'll start sending out your book-vendors."

"*Our* book-vendors," Jeb corrected with a smile. "This is collaboration in the true sense!"

Lon laughed and went away to find Timothy, George

and Fred while Jeb set the controls on the first machine to be emptied—a cigarette vendor that stood beneath a public TV screen.

Lon came upon the three men seated before the small electronic calculator in one corner of the workshop, industriously struggling with a mass of figures.

"How's it going?" he asked them. "Getting anywhere?"

Timothy looked up with a grim smile. "Sure we are, but we're going insane in the process. It looked easy. Now we've been doing the calculations for about fifty addresses and our heads are bursting and the Brain is getting mighty hot."

"Still, you're getting the results, that's all that matters. You're expendable!" he laughed.

The others joined in the good-natured joke and Lon sat himself down with them. He took a sheet from George and frowned at the melancholy face that that member pulled. Lon cast his eye over the mathematics involved and whistled silently—more as a fillip for the men than because he thought the maths were difficult.

"Well, well," he said. "What complicated coordinates!"

Fred pulled a length of tape from the calculator and examined it. He transferred a few figures to a sheet in front of him, did a bit of figuring and then passed the final results to Lon.

"Here's the fifty-third address data," he explained.

Lon took it with a nod. "I think you can pack up now, boys," he suggested. "Fifty-three should be enough to go on with. Let's go see how many vendors we've got and how the classics are coming along."

With evident relief, the three men joined him. They saw that twenty-eight machines had been ranged against the wall, ready for teleportation at any time. But the machines were empty of books.

In another section of the workshop a team of men were hard at work on the photo-copier, producing editions of the classics. Nearby, the photocopies were being bound and trimmed. The original ten-colour cover had reproduced

very well and the books looked most attractive. Once again Lon complimented the men on their work.

Seizing an armful of books, Lon motioned to the three calculators to do the same and marched back to the row of vendors. Rapidly, they stuffed the books into their racks, conscious that old Jeb was giving them searching glances from his position at the teleporter. A few return trips for more volumes and the job was done. Twenty-eight machines were complete.

"Now, we'll take the first twenty-eight addresses at random," Lon decreed. "See what happens. We may have to be more selective later on. Go fetch the sheets, George."

As George hurried off Lon went back to Jeb. The old man had just come to the seventieth machine.

"Leave the rest for now, Jeb," Lon instructed. "We want to get some of the vendors away."

Jeb fell in whole-heartedly with the idea. He got out of his seat and helped to line the machines up in front of the lens of the teleporter. George came back with the sheets and the teleporter was rigged for the first address.

Once again Jeb had the honour of training the lens on his book-vendor, sliding up the voltage control and releasing the tremendous energy which ripped the vendor apart subatomically and then reassembled it elsewhere. The old man grinned as the first machine disappeared.

"They go slap into the lounging rooms," he said. "Just where the books are wanted."

For once, Lon was pleased that all normal dwellings were constructed on the same plan. Without that, it would have been difficult to work out the data.

As he watched the machines disappear, with their shiny books bearing titles that made him shudder a little, Lon suddenly had an idea.

"Say, listen," he said. "If we use a different form of literature, we could send these things into the homes of the masses as well!"

The three calculators groaned, but Jeb seemed enthusiastic. With a few minutes' arguing, the three men were **won over to the idea**. Two of them commenced calculations at once, the other went in search of suitable literature.

CHAPTER SIX

Results at Last!

“YOUR idea about the intelligentsia was right enough,” Lon explained to Jeb. “But if we can get to the masses, it will be a big advance.”

“Yes, yes,” Jeb agreed. “The two go together. One is not much good without the other. I only wish I’d thought of it.”

“You’ve thought of enough,” Lon laughed. “It only struck me when I realised how bored I’d be with those classics. Why, if we concentrate on putting out science fiction to the masses there won’t even be the need for deliberate propaganda. The stories themselves will supply the interest in machines! We can send out millions of the machines.”

Jeb tilted his head in doubt. “We’re already running short of metal, Lon. Very soon there won’t be any left at all—let alone enough for millions of vendors.”

Lon thought for a moment. Then he snapped his fingers.

“You get back to the teleporter, Jeb. Finish placing these book-vendors, then teleport all the other machines back here. I think it’s worth it to get quick results. We can scrap the machines and use the metal for more book-vendors. In the meantime I’ll see about getting some more metal—I don’t think it’ll be too difficult.”

While Jeb worked at the teleporter, Lon gathered a gang of men and got a space cleared for when the old machines turned up. He told the men to equip themselves with demolition tools and to strip the machines as soon as they arrived.

When the space had been cleared, Lon turned back to Jeb and found that the old man had already got rid of all the twenty-eight book-vendors. He was now supervising the

filling up of the new ones that had been made, doing the job from the teleporter controls which he was adjusting to fetch back the other machines.

George returned with an armful of cheaply priced science fiction, western and detective novels. Lon looked them over and nodded.

"They'll do. Get 'em photocopied down to the same size as we've been doing the classics. Then have them churned out as fast as possible; we're going to need a heck of a lot."

George went away towards the photo-copier. Lon glanced round the workshop, saw that all was going well and decided he could leave for a moment. He told Jeb of his intentions and then went through to the meeting room and up to his private room on ground level.

There, he drew back the screen, gave a passable imitation of a man just waking up, climbed into his outer clothes and left the building. The policewoman smiled at him as he passed through the gate.

A brisk walk took him to the local offices of the State Broadcasting System. The lift—the official lift—took him up to the twentieth level. A few more steps took him to the door of the Regional Director's office, where a melodious artificial voice answered his signal and bade him enter. He went in and sat down in front of the Regional Director's desk.

"Now then, Lon, my lad, what's the trouble?" the gay young woman asked.

"No trouble at all," Lon smiled. "How are the sources?"

The RD sniffed, closed her eyes and shuddered. "Bad," she said. "Definitely bad. The Home Office sends me reams of official propaganda that's almost hypnotic in its boring capacity. Nobody else sends me anything. Nothing that's broadcastable anyway. There's better pay on the Tech system!"

Lon smiled inwardly at the RD's choice of words when describing the Home Office propaganda material.

"That's encouraging—for me," he commented. "Means

you'll be more likely to look at a little thing of mine for——"

The RD's eyebrows shot up and she stared at Lon. "You don't mean you've brought something for me again? Dear boy, you're an angel! Let me see it quick. It can go out on this afternoon's transmission. I'll rip out a Home Office dirge and put your stuff in. Then we'll repeat it in the——"

"Hold it, hold it!" Lon cried, waving his hand. "I haven't brought it with me. In fact, I haven't quite finished it yet. Should be done in a day or two. I just thought I'd call and see if you were interested."

A look of supreme disappointment came over the RD's face. She let her body go loose as though all the strength had run away from it, slumped at the shoulders and regarded Lon with a jaundiced eye.

"It's very wrong of you to build me up like that and then let me drop," she accused. "Anyway, bring it as soon as you can, or I'll go insane with waiting."

Lon stood up. "Okay, then. It's a commission?"

"Of course it is!" she answered irritably. "Have I ever turned anything of yours down? Regard yourself as on permanent commission. Bring me in something every week."

"No can do," Lon smiled. "I'm a busy man. Scientific Mechanics takes up most of my time."

"Oh, that crazy bunch!" the RD exclaimed. "That's not your line. You're best at sociology. Is this new thing sociological?"

"In a way," Lon replied, hoping that it would be. "Well, I'll blow. See you in a day or two."

The RD shrugged helplessly as he went.

Lon's next call was on his old friend Nhuga, who worked not far from the State Broadcasting System offices. Nhuga was a doctor—among other things. Lon found him hard at work with a particularly difficult clinical laboratory test. The irony of it was that there were plenty of machines in the Scientific Mechanics building that could have done the job in a second or two. But Nhuga had refused to become classified as a Scientific Mechanic. Medicine was his love.

"Drop that infernal test-tube and listen to me," Lon said in a good-natured gruff voice. "I've got a job for you."

Nhuga regarded him quizzically. "Really? As it happens I've got plenty of jobs for myself! Now take this test——"

"Let the Devil take it!" Lon laughed. "This is a special job. Top secret."

"Another of your little schemes?" Nhuga asked suspiciously. "You're not going to get me mixed up in your rotten politics, are you?"

"No more than you are already! I want you to do a broadcast for me."

"A broadcast? Why can't you do it yourself? Got a throat?"

"No. I can't do it myself because I'm not a hypnotist."

Nhuga opened his mouth, left it that way while he stared at Lon, comprehension dawning on him. Then he shut it as he said:

"This sounds interesting. Mass hypnosis, I imagine?"

"That's the general idea. I've got a special propaganda dose for you. Naturally, you start off with some innocuous stuff—I've got that too. Then you go into your black magic tricks and put the listeners to sleep. After that, the way's open for the propaganda. Good idea?"

"Yes. Yours?"

"No. Another member's. I should think the main difficulty will be to ensure that *all* your audience is hypnotised. It wouldn't do for a few strong minds to hear the propaganda under ordinary conditions."

"Don't worry about that," Nhuga laughed. "So long as you make the first part right, and advertise it right, there won't *be* any strong minds listening."

"I hope you're right. I take it you'll do it, then?" Lon asked.

"Sure, sure. I'm interested."

"Right, then. Now you can go back to your test-tube. I'll be seeing you in a day or so."

"Don't forget about that advertising," Nhuga warned.

"I won't. So long!"

Leaving the hospital where Nhuga worked, Lon stepped out briskly for the Home Office. He had decided to have lunch with Heln—just to make sure she didn't mean what she said last night.

In her office, Heln tried to collect her confused thoughts. She had left Inspector Line shortly after the alarm incident and come straight back to her office to think things out. But the process wasn't going too well.

In the first place, the whole thing seemed ridiculous. How could the machines have been emptied of coins when no one had ever been near them? And yet they had been emptied, there was no doubt about that. She had gone across herself and heard the loud ring as a new coin was inserted and fell to the bottom of the empty box.

Did it mean that the underground force had some magical means of taking the money away? It certainly seemed like it. The belief in suspicions that lurks at the bottom of everyone's mind began to rise up and mock her. Perhaps . . . perhaps the machine-planters were not real people at all! Maybe they were some kind of—No! The whole thing was stupid!

Heln shook herself and took a quick peek in her desk mirror. The face she saw was, after all, a sensible one. No nonsense about it. The mind above the face was all right, surely? Suppose . . . but no, the inspector had seen it happen, too. It was no hallucination.

Then she remembered the Prime Minister. She could just imagine what that harridan was going to say when confronted with her improbable story. Even the inspector's added testimony wouldn't help a lot to a woman whose mind didn't work according to conventional logic—or, Heln slyly admitted to herself, to any woman.

There would be storms on the Home Front right enough!

Heln shrugged philosophically and brought out the typewriter. Documents like this, she thought, as she began her report of the incident to the Prime Minister, were not to be trusted to male secretaries.

The words flowed in an easy stream. The incident was so easy to tell about, so difficult to explain. Heln decided

to keep off explanations altogether and commit only the actual observed details to print.

She was coming near the end of the report when her TV-phone rang. Thinking it a routine call, she leaned over and casually flicked the switch, carrying on with her typing at the same time. She stopped suddenly, half-way through the caller's first sentence:

"They've gone, madam! The machines—all of them!"

Heln looked up to see the astounded face of the Police Commissioner staring at her from the screen.

"Gone?" Heln repeated. "What d'you mean?"

"The reports have been coming in over the last few seconds," the Commissioner elaborated. "Every machine has disappeared—the illicit ones, I mean. The officers observing for emptying reported it first, then the beat-women phoned in from all over. They've just disappeared!" she added unnecessarily.

"Good heavens! What could have caused that?" Heln asked rhetorically. "Do you suppose our observation points scared them?—yes, that's it! They saw we were getting really determined to stamp them out, and decided to withdraw the machines before we captured any of their people. This will make a fine report to the Prime Minister!"

The Commissioner, who by now had somewhat recovered from the shock, shook her head dubiously. "You may be right, and I expect you are, but they'll be back after a bit. There was too smart an organisation behind the machines for them to be removed for good."

Heln refused to be discouraged. "Still," she said, "it's something to be going on with. It's the first time we've ever accomplished anything against the underground. Well. I'm going to get a report off to the Prime Minister right away. I shan't forget to mention your part in this, Commissioner."

Heln waited until she had finished saying thank you and then cut her off. Happily, she applied herself to the report again. Leaving the account of the disappearing money as it stood, she followed it immediately with the news that had just come in, giving full emphasis to the rapid deployment of police forces effected by the Commissioner and

emphasising the probability that the machines were taken away because of this action.

As she finished the last sentence she felt pretty pleased with herself. Oh, if only she could tell Lon about it! Now, this very minute. *That* would show him whether she was a real Home Secretary!

Instead, she pasted the sheets down in an envelope and rang for a special messenger. She sent the report straight to the Prime Minister with an urgent note on it. Then, feeling she had earned it, she left her office to go to lunch.

She was humming gaily as she stepped from the lift at ground level and walked sprightly through the portals of the Home Office. Light of foot, she hurried along the pavement towards the little place where she normally had lunch—some few hundred yards away from the Office. She was never happy in the stuffy atmosphere of the Service Refectory.

As she turned a corner, in sight of the eating place, a hand took her arm and began leading her away into a new direction. Even before she glanced round, she knew it was Lon. And a rosy warm glow ran through her.

Still, she must put up a little resistance!

“Take your hand away at once!” she snapped. “How dare you do such a thing in the street! Where are you taking me, anyway?”

The last sentence was so out of place with the rest that Lon burst into laughter. But he took his hand away all the same.

“Little place down here I know,” he answered. “Give you a good lunch—unless you want to pay, in which case you can give me one!”

“We’ll settle that when we get there,” Heln commented. “What’s behind all this, anyway? Have you come to apologise or something?”

“Me? Apologise?” he asked in mock-amazement. “You should know a man never has to apologise to a lady! Didn’t they teach you that in the Service?”

“There’s no need to be facetious! Tell me now, what’s all this in aid of?”

Lon gently guided her towards the new destination.

"Well, I thought I'd have a chat with you about last night—you missed some very fine chicken, by the way——"

"I'll make up for it now." Heln smiled for the first time, and felt a lot happier because of the release.

"Okay. But what about last night—you weren't really as angry as you seemed, were you?" "You didn't really mean all you said?"

"I don't know how angry I seemed, but I *was* very, very angry. I'd looked forward to a wonderful evening—and then there was the dance—and then you spoilt it all by bringing up marriage again, and by casting slurs on my job!"

"I'd been looking forward to the evening, too," Lon claimed, though he wondered how the blazes he would have got away from her to see the Prime Minister. "That dance must have made me say things I wouldn't have said at another time."

Heln tacitly accepted his proffered palm leaf. "You were wrong, anyway," she beamed. "I'll have you know I've just pulled off a pretty good coup! Not many Home Secretaries have managed as much."

Genuinely interested, Lon asked for further information. Heln explained about the tragedy at the observation post and then described what had happened to the machines—as a result of her planning.

Once she got well into the story, the whole thing came back to Lon and he found it most difficult not to laugh aloud. Now and then he had a twinge of conscience about letting Heln go on thinking these wonderful things about herself when he knew the real reason for the disappearance of the machines. However, he decided he'd buy her the finest lunch she'd ever had as a kind of compensation to his own spirit.

When she had finished, he congratulated her heartily. "Maybe you'll be the next Prime Minister after this," he hazarded. "I should think you'd get a salary rise or something, anyway."

"I don't think I'd like being Prime Minister," Heln said. "The person who holds that position is not allowed to be married."

They came up to the restaurant door. "I thought you'd put all thoughts of marriage out of your head," Lon said.

She glanced up at him slyly. "Some of them are very difficult to put out of one's head," she said artlessly.

"Hmm," Lon returned. "I guess you're right. Anyway, let's discuss it over lunch."

As he passed her through the door, she pinched his hand.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Moonette

THE lunch was supremely edible and most enjoyable. Both Lon and Heln managed to get through it without treading on each other's corns. When it was over, Heln escorted him a little way along the pavement and then left him near the Home Office to hurry back to her work. Before leaving, she made a date with him for that evening.

Lon, feeling that life could be worse, walked quickly along the pavement in the direction of the Scientific Mechanics building. But when he came to a side-street a little way from the building, he turned down it and strode into a construction contractor's yard.

He made his way to the manager's office—a wooden shed across the yard. All about him were signs of industry under difficulties. The illegality of machines meant that all construction work that was impossible without machines had to be sponsored by the Government, with consequent delays, frustrations and hitches. Here and there, men were idle, waiting for their forms to come back. At other places, teams struggled manfully with jobs that could have been done in a tenth of the time, with a tenth as much effort, by mechanisation.

Lon shook his head at the stark evidence of decadence and passed into the manager's office.

Red-faced and puffing over a pile of documents, the manager looked up with a scowl that changed to a smile when he recognised Lon. He got up and moved a chair into Lon's range.

"Nice to see you, Lon. Come to buy something? Want a new wing on the Building?"

Lon sat down. "Glad to notice you're still taking things easy," Lon grimaced, nodding towards the papers. "No, we don't want a new wing, but we *do* want some new steel."

"Steel?" the manager said, as though it were some commodity that had never come within his experience. "You want some steel?"

"That's it. A good few tons of it. Have you got any to spare?"

The manager snorted. "Have I? By heavens, Lon, you can have all I've got. It's no use to me!"

"Why's that?" Lon asked innocently.

The manager snorted. "As if you didn't know! Boron, that's why. Too much perishin' boron! If I tried to build a tool-shed with it, the place'd fall down in a week. Stuff's useless. I just have to take it, because it's part of my rations. It's lying in the store-house, idle."

"Then you won't be wanting very much for it?" Lon said, shrewdly.

"Cunning devil!" the manager grinned. "All right, you can have it at cost—plus cartage, though. I say, that's going to be a problem, cartage. The Government doesn't usually check on what we do with our materials, but there's always a guard on the Scientific Mechanics building. It's sure to be reported if we turn up there with a few tons of steel on a State lorry—and we can't *carry* it round!"

"Don't you worry about that part of it," Lon assured him. "Just leave the steel in a particular store-house one night and it'll be gone in the morning."

"Just like that, eh? You Mechanics seem to get around all right. I wish my jobs were as simple as that."

"Maybe they will be some day," Lon said casually.

The manager looked at him sharply. "I've never questioned your activities, Lon, because I know you. I'm not going to question them now. But I'd like to say that if that steel helps to do what you say, then you're very welcome to it free of charge."

Lon laughed. "Oh, no need for that. We've got a bit of money between us, and as the steel's no good to you——"

"Don't you care about the boron?" the manager wanted to know.

"We don't want the steel for heavy structural work—just, well, just cabinets—kind of."

"Cagey, aren't you? Oh, well, I don't care so long as I get rid of the stuff without a loss. It's in store-house five. Take it when you want it."

Lon got the manager to show him on a plan where store-house five was situated, paid him the money in advance and left with mutual good feelings. He was whistling as he walked back to the Scientific Mechanics building.

This time when he got inside, in order to allay any possible glimmerings of suspicion, he spent a few hours working in a laboratory, under the full glare of the Government scanners. His conversation with the man working next to him was casual and innocuous. No one monitoring the building would guess that the casualness was deliberate. It would appear to be an ordinary afternoon's work at the bench.

Lon mentioned that he was going to have a rest and went into his private room. There, the old routine was enacted and a minute or two later he was back in the workshop.

The first glance showed him that considerable progress had been made. The old machines—as Helm had forewarned him—had been brought back and were now being dismantled, their sheet metal parts being flattened and worked ready for turning into book-vendor components.

A nice pile of photo-copied classics stood by the infra-red drier, ready to be packed as each machine came out with its crinkly lacquer coat. A little way from the classics was a smaller pile of literature for the masses. The men weren't wasting any time.

Old Jeb was busy at the teleporter, shifting the vendors as fast as they were produced, supervising the packing between whiles. The old man looked radiantly happy. Lon could understand why.

"How's it going?" Lon asked him.

"Pretty fair," Jeb replied. "Every one is going straight to its destination without a hitch. No trouble at all. The men have got the hang of things now. The vendors

are rolling off the belt at about three an hour. We'll be needing that extra metal soon."

Lon nodded. "I've just been seeing about it. Any time tonight, fix the teleporter on store-house five in Bramble's yard and you'll get all you want. Here's a plan of the place. The steel's high in boron but I don't suppose that will matter, will it?"

"Don't see why it should," Jeb mused. "So long as nobody wants to jump on the vendors!"

"The intelligentsia wouldn't dream of doing that!" Lon laughed. "Well, that's fine. Things seem to be moving very nicely. We'll soon be in a pretty strong position—maybe strong enough for a show-down."

Jeb eyed him reflectively. "What form might that be going to take?"

Lon shrugged. "Still to be worked out. A lot will depend on the circumstances. I hope it won't mean violence."

The old man looked shocked. "*Could* it mean that?"

"Could, too! There hasn't been any violence for a good long while—and it's a primitive instinct, remember. Maybe we've talked ourselves into believing we're now high-minded and civilised, but there's still the animal underneath. The show-down might provide just the excuse everybody's been subconsciously waiting for. However, that bridge can be passed over when it's constructed. I'm off to do a bit of paper work."

Lon left the old man, nodded to the workers and went into the meeting room next door. There he settled himself at a desk, took out a typewriter and stared at the keys. After a while, the thoughts began to come—thoughts for the broadcast propaganda. Rapidly he tapped the keys.

Prime Minister Martha had slept soundly after Lon had left her the previous night. She had the great and glorious knack of coming to terms with her conscience whatever her actions had been. In the morning, she had awoken fresh and energetic. Within an hour of rising she was at her desk, dealing efficiently, if somewhat harshly, with the routine of State.

Several reports from Ministers had arrived overnight. These she read and annotated marginally. Then she drafted long, stern letters to the various Ministers with her jerky quill pen, showing them just where they were wrong and where they were not quite as right as they'd thought they were.

Through it all was a slim vein of carefully woven treason. Not necessarily pro-Tech, but certainly not anti-Tech. She had no need to ponder how to do this. The right words, the right approach came to her automatically. It was part of her personality. She knew exactly how far to go in order to avoid creating even the tiniest mote of suspicion. Her letters could be read by anyone, and if they had no prior knowledge of her predilections they would never know what she was doing.

A lesser woman would have been impatient at this essential wariness. The Prime Minister, by Statute, had only two years of office. Martha's second year was drawing to a close. Her task had to be accomplished in what time remained to her; the Government had made so many mistakes, she was resigned to the certainty that she would not be re-elected. But, with innate knowledge, she knew her methods were right—that even if she failed, no other methods would have succeeded.

So the quill pen bobbed and the gentle subversiveness went out to the Ministers.

When the letters were finished and a few other routine jobs cleared away, Martha did not sit back and think. She went through to Secretary Roberts, scorning the phone as part of her act, and asked for the State Broadcasting System files. These she took back to her office and perused carefully.

One folder she studied especially well. When she had finished, she nodded to herself in satisfaction. The folder showed that Lon had indeed supplied the System with a fair amount of material in the past. He was considered to be a regular and desirable contributor by his Regional Director. That settled that point.

Prime Minister Martha took the file back to her secretary and demanded the Medical Registry. Taking the heavy

book firmly between her hands, she again trotted back to her office.

The Medical Registry she placed on her desk was not the one to be found in libraries and private houses. It was a special State document where the usual information was implemented with a good deal of confidential matter about the people listed inside. The scanning service made periodical additions to it, as it did to all the other Professional Registries.

Martha thumbed through the pages until she came to the N section. Then she searched until she reached the people named Nhuga.

There were few of them, and only one who could possibly be the man Lon had spoken of. The entry against him showed that he had indicated such a strong flair for medicine in his youth that the usual sex-bar had been lifted and he had been allowed to qualify—a distinction he shared with very few other men.

The entry also proved that Nhuga had indeed made a special study of hypnotism and had reached a high degree of proficiency in it. He had perfected a system of hypnotism by the printed word, the spoken word and by telepathy.

Martha nodded to herself. It came back to her now. She would have used him herself on numerous occasions if it hadn't been for his skill at thought-reading. It would not do for him to discover some of Martha's hidden thoughts!

Nothing in the information about Nhuga showed that he was in any way antipathetic to the Government—indeed, on several occasions he had willingly been of great help.

That, then, took care of that. Prime Minister Martha had great faith in Lon, but she would never have attained her position by being gullible. However much she trusted a person, she always made a check. But it pleased her when, as now, the checks confirmed her own estimation.

Informing her secretary that she would be absent for a few hours, Martha strode majestically from the room, down the stairs and out into the street. She wore no outer coat and bravely faced the wind that whistled along the road.

Several minutes of brisk walking brought her to her home. The maid answered her knock.

Martha went straight into her study and locked the door. The rule of the house was that if the door were locked she was not to be disturbed in any circumstances. Even so, she did not stay in the study. The old-fashioned house had its uses, for there was a panel in the wall near the fireplace that opened when she pressed a hidden control. Martha passed through into the room beyond.

Safe it is to say that any of her Government confrères seeing that room would have lost all touch with the real world after having their beliefs shattered so effectively. For here, the woman who rebelled against any kind of machine, had surrounded herself with mechanisms. A shrewd observer would have said that this room was the only thing that kept Prime Minister Martha sane.

Every wall of the room was covered with electrical gadgets and equipment, a thick cable disappearing into the ground and running away to a secret, Tech-controlled, power source.

Very often, after a particularly tiresome debate, Martha came here for relaxation, playing with the machines and easing her tormented soul thereby. That was why she had such sympathy with the Scientific Mechanics, and had forced through the Bill that gave them their rights.

But this time, Martha was not in a playing mood. The equipment around her also had its functional aspect, as she proceeded to demonstrate—to her great pleasure.

Seating herself before a radio rig, she switched in the power. While waiting for the thing to warm up, she took out a booklet from a drawer under the rig and a slide-rule. Consulting the booklet, she manipulated the slide-rule deftly, jotting down her results on a printwriter. The hum had been going for several seconds before the calculations were finished.

Martha now made adjustments to the radio rig, glancing periodically at the calculations. She swept the antenna control back and forth until a pip-pip sounded. She locked the antenna to a tracking system and switched on a microphone.

"Martha here—Martha here," she called into the mike. "Are you getting me, Moonette? Are you getting me—over."

After a few seconds' delay, a voice came through her speaker. "Got you, Martha—got you, Martha. Come in with the gen—over."

Martha turned up the volume a little, knowing the room was soundproof. That had been a necessary precaution. It wouldn't do anyone any good if the people got to know about Moonette, the artificial satellite that the Techs had managed to build and which was even now circling the Earth. There would be such a wave of fear and suspicion that nothing could hold the people back. But Martha was confident the secret had been well kept.

"The first thing," Martha called over to Moonette, "is that I wish I didn't have to calculate your position every time I want to call you. I know it's a treble security to alter your orbit periodically, but I think you could make it a regular alteration. Then we could have tables showing your position at all times—over."

Martha waited. The response that came through after the necessary time lag was so indistinct that Martha suspected it was being done deliberately. However, that was a small point.

"The more important thing is this. Very soon I'm going to have a special broadcast made. I won't go into details but it's in the Tech cause, obviously. At the moment the broadcast ends, the people are going to be more susceptible to Tech propaganda than they've ever been. We must make sure they get a good dose."

Martha went straight on, without any reference to notes, giving the instructions to cover the whole event.

"I want you to get your guided missiles ready. Fill them up with leaflets—the latest and best. If you haven't got enough, hurry up and get some sent up. Hold the missiles ready for launching from twelve hours from now until zero. I want them to arrive and burst at every point in the country the moment the broadcast ends. I'll call you back later with more details about times. This is just to give you a chance to prepare those missiles—over and out."

Martha switched off. For one brief moment she permitted herself to rub her hands. Then she stood up militantly and started back for the study, where she began to write her propaganda broadcast.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Catastrophe

HELN sighed contentedly as she sat herself down at her desk after her lunch with Lon. Life was a lot better than it had been for some time past. Partly it was Lon, partly it was the disappearance of the illicit machines. That was a really big load off her shoulders.

The problem had been smouldering away at the back of her mind ever since the first machine had appeared. She had spent hours thinking up possible ways of outwitting the underground, but none of them had been in the least effective.

It, and the Tech problem, had played on her nervous system, making her irritable, unsure of herself, unsure of Lon, unsure of the whole structure of Society. The point had come where she would have liked to break with the entire scheme of things—leave it all and walk out and wander, thoughtless, uncaring.

Now at least one burden had been lifted. And the lifting of it had made the others seem all the lighter. Lon was all right, really. He had queer ideas, but so did most men—it was part of their nature.

Society was all right, really. It had its faults, but what society didn't? At any rate, it was based on sound principles and that was more than could be said for the Tech régime.

And she was all right, really. At times, maybe, she slipped up on her job. But that was because her job had so many facets. It was impossible to be superlative at all of them all at once. Any glimmerings of doubt the Prime Minister had as to Heln's suitability for the post of Home

Secretary would surely be dispelled by the report on the disappearance of the illicit machines.

That should make up for a whole lot of mistakes.

Heln suddenly realised she had not yet heard from the Prime Minister about the report. That was strange, she thought. Surely the Prime Minister was aware of its importance and would want to congratulate her, and have her pass on a recommendation to the Police Commissioner?

She rang through to her secretary and asked if the Prime Minister had yet received the report. After a moment's delay, the secretary replied that the Prime Minister's secretary said that the Prime Minister was out at the moment but would be back in a few hours. The Prime Minister had not yet seen the report, but it was waiting on her desk for her return.

Heln thanked the secretary and rang off. That was all right, then. If the Prime Minister hadn't seen it, she couldn't take any action. That would come later in the afternoon.

Giving out another sigh of pleasure, Heln decided to reapply herself to the Tech problem. With her new-found confidence in herself she ought to be able to do something useful in that direction. Of course, it would have to have the Prime Minister's approval before going into effect, but that, too, could probably be arranged on the strength of the latest report.

Heln stared at the wall, thinking. What was really wanted, she thought, was a film that really showed up the baseness of machines, so that the people could really see the dangers inherent in their use. So far, all the propaganda films had taken the reverse approach—simply pointing how nice life could be without machines. Now she'd show how nasty it would be *with* them.

A call to Archives brought her a pile of books from the State Library—all about machines. She placed them on her desk, took out the typewriter and began her film script.

The first part of the script, she decided, would deal with the problem in general—the way it affected everyone. Accordingly she scripted scenes that would show the num-

ber of people employed on doing a certain task by hand, followed by pictures indicating the decimating effect when the machines came into use. These were actual events that had taken place in the past.

Leaving unemployment, she passed on to the effect the mechanisation of industry had had on consumer goods. Scenes showed the luxuriance of fresh foods changing into the endless stacks of canned commodities. Vital statistics showed the enormous drop in consumption of fresh food-stuffs paralleling the equally enormous rise in consumption of tinned foods.

The indiscriminate use of the printing machine was exemplified by stretches of glaring hoardings, advertising anything from corsets to Cadillacs, and marring the plain beauty of country fields and town architecture.

Cleverly animated road-casualty graphs showed the effect of uncontrolled production of automobiles, aeroplanes and motor-boats. Starkly effective crashes were simulated, shots of smashed cars superimposed with cracked-up planes and sinking boats in a grotesque montage of terror.

And the final sequences in the first part of the script showed quite plainly the terrifying heritage of the flying machine as such, coupled with all the mechanisms that had been invented to go with it. Actual documentaries of the Second World War were inserted. The bombs were falling, the houses disappearing in dust, noise and death. The planes dived on helpless humanity, machine-guns chattering against the death-rattles of their victims.

The last shots showed a tiny speck falling from a plane, followed it to the ground and then jumped back to give a wide panorama to the vivid flash and the slowly rising mushroom of smoke. The very last shot was of a pile of bodies, high as a small mountain, behind the legend: **HARVEST REAPED BY ONE MACHINE.**

By this time, Heln was getting quite worked up. Inside herself she was seething with indignation at the machines. Her fingers flew over the typeprinter keys, rapidly flicked the pages of the books, made notes and skilfully put the script together. This, she decided, was going to be the greatest thing yet in propaganda.

To get a little light relief after the tension of the end of the first part, Heln opened the second half with simple personal disadvantages in the use of machines. The very first one was a little childish for any other kind of circumstance but here it fitted well.

A woman, cosily asleep in a bed that looked inviting, suddenly sat up and smashed her fist down on the alarm clock that had begun to ring beside her. The woman was then seen to react irritably in flashes taken during the day—proof that machines were responsible for people “getting out of the wrong side of the bed.”

Similar sequences indicated how annoying the telephone can be when one is relaxing, how maddening the radio is when *you* don't want to listen to it, how aggravating a bus was when it broke down and the passengers had to use the feet that were given them for locomotion.

Stretching things a bit, Heln scripted a sequence showing, or purporting to show, the dangerous results that weighing machines had on women of past ages. Once, they had never given their weight a thought, and had gone through life eating whatever food they could get and benefiting in health enormously by it. Then, when the cult of weighing machines came in—usually as an advertisement for something—the women got weight conscious. Weight itself, assumed a character like some hideous disease. At all costs women kept their weight down. Several of them died in the process. Here was death at a penny-in-the-slot.

That naturally preceded the episodes where cigarette machines came in for the hammer. Again vital statistics were shown in the form of animated graphs—proving that since the advent of the cigarette machine (ignoring all other factors) the death rate from lung cancer had risen dramatically. It was also suggested that smoking as a whole had caused more deaths than all the major wars. Smoking, the contention was, would never have caught on to such an extent without the advent of machines.

Following all this up with a direct appeal to the mind was an easy task. All Heln had to do was go back into remote scientific history and compare the stature of the

minds then to the minds now. The difference was clear to everyone. There was not one single really original mind in that Society. Men of science had come to rely so much on twisting knobs and pressing buttons to get their results, that original thought could almost be said to be beyond their biological capacities.

Heln shirked the question of whether it would be a good thing to have original minds in a back-to-nature Society—and followed a well-established precedent thereby.

The script was coming along well. Heln was feeling elated. Her enthusiasm rose with every word she wrote. This, she knew, was going to shake 'em!

And then the TV phone rang. Still in her good mood, Heln answered it. The Police Commissioner stared at her. Heln was just about to tell her that the Prime Minister hadn't seen the report yet when she noticed the expression on the Commissioner's face.

"What—what's the matter?" Heln asked, pleasure draining away from her. "Something wrong?"

"Indeed, yes, madam," the Commissioner answered. "At first I thought it might be a hoax or that the informant was insane but after checking her record I realised that——"

"For heaven's sake tell what's *happened!*" Heln exclaimed. "We can have the details later."

"Yes, madam. The point is that illicit machines have been placed again—actually in people's homes!"

She waited a few moments for the news to sink in, and it needed that long. Then Heln motioned her to elaborate.

"Just after lunch a woman sent a report to her local police station that she had found a machine in her lounge—a machine full of books. Of course, the police on duty thought she was insane, because she said she'd been in the house all day and no one else had come in there. Nevertheless they forwarded the report to Headquarters and sent an officer to investigate."

The Commissioner paused for breath. Heln checked that the recorder she had switched on was working properly. Then the Commissioner spoke again.

"The officer returned to the station to say that it was

quite true; there *was* a machine in the woman's lounge. And the woman still maintained that no one had come into her house that day. The local police surgeon went along to see if the woman was suffering from deliberate amnesia—you know, he thought she might have made the machine herself and then realised the serious consequences of it and retreated from the situation, in her mind.

"But while he was gone, two other reports of a similar kind came in to the same police station. By that time, Headquarters had received several such reports from a number of widely scattered stations. Anyway, the surgeon came back and said there was nothing wrong with the woman. He would seem to be right. There could hardly have been so many coincidences all at once, so to speak."

"Quite," Heln snapped. "You say these machines had books in them. What d'you mean?"

"That appears to be the worst part of it, madam. They are slot machines where one gets a book in return for the coin. That's bad enough, but the books are classics. That's even worse, but here's the terrible part—the classics are in the original versions!"

The significance evaded Heln for a moment. Then it came to her. Original versions! The situation couldn't possibly be worse. All the careful propaganda she had been putting out for months would be knocked aside by the ideas and sentiments in the classics.

Her world rocked. There seemed to be no point in going on. She was finished.

Her eye caught the film script—No! She was *not* finished. She would go on and beat them again as she had done before! She stiffened herself and faced the Commissioner squarely.

"Have we anything to go on? These people who reported the machines—is there anything common about them?"

"Yes, I was coming to that," the Commissioner answered. "I had them looked up in the dossiers at once and found that they were all scheduled as intellectuals, thinkers and so on. It would seem that all the

machines so far reported have been placed with the intelligentsia."

Heln's eyes narrowed. "Is that so? Then there's more to this than just a commercial aspect. These underground criminals are after more than just the money from the machines or they wouldn't have chosen the intelligent—Of course! That's why they put classics in the machines, original classics, too! They are working for the Techs—if they are not actually Techs themselves. This is extremely serious Madam Commissioner!"

The Commissioner's face showed that, seeing things in the new light, did put a sinister angle to it. Her face relaxed into its usual frown as soon as the Techs were mentioned.

"I was a fool not to realise it long ago," Heln blamed herself. "To think that all this time I've been looking on them as mere criminals—no more anti-social than a thief! And all the time they've been working up their insidious treason!"

The Commissioner, perhaps because of the kind of job she had, was the first to return to practicality.

"What will we *do* about it?" she wanted to know.

"Do? We'll confiscate the machines at once—I authorise you to do that now. We'll also get new legislation passed making it illegal not to report one of these machines."

"Won't that make us look rather silly?" the Commissioner suggested. "I mean, it'll show the public that we can have no idea how these machines get into the houses."

"We'll have to risk that. Of course, the legislation will have to be approved by the Prime Minister, who will——"

Heln stopped short. The Prime Minister. For the moment, Heln had forgotten about her. Now a loose feeling came into Heln's stomach as she realised what the Prime Minister was going to say when she got this news—especially after reading the latest report on the machines disappearing.

"Excuse me for a moment, but stay there," Heln ordered the Commissioner, before switching her off.

Then Heln rang through to find out about the report. The Prime Minister's secretary said that the Prime Minister had returned and was now reading the report. Heln rang off with an angry exclamation. A moment ago she had been anxious for the Prime Minister to read the document, now she would have given anything to prevent it. However, it couldn't be helped.

She turned again to the TV phone and brought the Commissioner's face back. "As I was saying," she intoned carefully, **not letting the Commissioner see what effect the Prime Minister's name had had on her**, "the Prime Minister will have to approve the new legislation. She will decide whether it makes us look silly or not. But the present action lies in confiscating the machines—and in making a thorough check of the classics in the State Library. Those are the only originals in existence and if they've been stolen we'll be in a much stronger position for drastic measures."

The Commissioner looked apologetic. "I'm afraid that won't help us, madam. I've already had a check made and the originals are quite intact. Every one of them is accounted for."

"How the blazes do these people do it!" Heln exclaimed in annoyance. "Are they magicians or wizards or what? First they withdraw their money from the machines without anyone going near them. Then they place machines in people's houses without anyone going near them. Now they make copies of the classics without anyone going near the originals! It's preposterous!"

"It's also a fact, madam," said the Commissioner gently.

"True, true," Heln admitted, forcing herself to cool down. "But, woman to woman, Commissioner, what the heck are we going to do about this black magic?"

"Don't misunderstand me, Home Secretary, but I've wondered that a long time—and I think we might get some help from the Scientific Mechanics if we approach them properly."

Heln was about to explode in indignation. Then she realised the Commissioner was speaking the truth. The

Scientific Mechanics were about the only ones who understood machines. And she had a date with Lon that evening.

"I'll look into that suggestion, Commissioner," she said.

CHAPTER NINE

Help Required

A FEW hours after sitting down at the typeprinter, Lon sat back and let out a long breath. The last phrase of his propaganda broadcast script was finished.

Reading it through, he felt pleased with his efforts. True, there was nothing world-shaking about his literary style, but the content was all that was required. A nice gentle reminder to the people that machines made life merrier. The script should be very effective in building up public goodwill towards the Scientific Mechanics.

Lon made a quick inspection of the workshop, satisfied himself that all was going well and then came upstairs. With the scrip secure in a handcase, he left the Scientific Mechanics building and went along to the hospital where Nhuga worked.

The doctor was still busy with his instruments, but this time he showed less desire not to be disturbed. Lon announced that he had the script ready. Nhuga sat down and read it through.

"That's fine," he said at length. "You've made a good job of it—and I think I can do the same for my end. I've been doing a bit of writing myself, here——" he handed Lon a sheet of paper—"take a look at this."

Lon scanned the sheet interestedly. "The advertising, eh?" he said. "Pretty good. I guess you know your stuff all right. I'll get this put over in the programme summaries. I don't think there's a great deal of risk attached to this business. We can always plead muddled scripts if someone in authority hears the broadcast and *isn't* hypnotised."

Nhuga laughed. "We've taken bigger risks than this in the past. Some of those jobs I did for the Government would have sent me down for treason—if the Government hadn't been composed of women!"

"True enough," Lon agreed. "But we mustn't underestimate them. Once we start doing that, we'll collapse. However, there's not much chance of that. You hold yourself ready for the broadcast and I'll let you know tomorrow when the thing will take place. Okay?"

"Okay," Nhuga agreed. "Just give the word when you're ready."

As Lon left the hospital the streets were darkening with evening shades. A public clock in the street told him that seven o'clock was only fifteen minutes away. Nearly time to keep his date with Heln.

He strolled slowly in the direction of the club where Heln had arranged to meet him, turning over in his mind the events of the last day or two. After all these years of scheming and planning, it looked as though the climax may have arrived suddenly. There was a sort of tension within him—as though he sensed a cloud approaching bursting-point above his head. Something would have to give soon—either he or they. Somehow he was confident it would be they. Where Heln fitted into the pattern he was not sure—but again, he felt equal to handling it; though she would cut up rough when she learned how he had been deceiving her.

A sprinkling of people had wandered into the bar of the club by the time Lon arrived. They sat around drinking or stood against the bar ordering their refreshments. Lon recognised several of the "hidden" Scientific Mechanics, but gave no sign of having done so. They, too, ignored him apart from casual glances, though he was sure they knew him.

The "hidden" members of the organisation were in many ways the most useful. Scattered all over the country, their true leanings were unknown to the Government. They weren't Scientific Mechanics inasmuch as they *must* be always experimenting with machines. But their sym-

pathies lay very strongly in the direction of the way the Scientific Mechanics were going. The "hidden" members were staunch supporters of the cause for bringing machines to the people.

And, being unrecognised by the Government, they were able to do things that the orthodox Mechanics could not do. The self-confessed Mechanics were under continuous surveillance by the authorities—except in their underground workshop—and a good many things were politely (and never officially) barred from them. The "hidden" members were free and unwatched. They could come and go as they pleased, consistent with their jobs. Lon felt that when the hour of action *did* come, it would be the "hidden" members who would swing the balance.

He bought himself a drink from the robot-server and sat down at one of the tables. That was one thing for which the women ought to be commended—although, they required the man to wait for them, they had swept away any stigma to his buying himself a drink while he did it.

In due course, Heln arrived. As convention demanded, she apologised for being late—both of them realising what a farce the whole thing was; but pleasant all the same.

"I'll join you in a drink before dinner," she announced. "Would you like another?"

Lon said that he would indeed. Heln smiled and went away to the bar, elbowed her way through the other women up there and ordered two drinks. She carried them back expertly.

"Now," she said, sitting down beside him. "How have you been getting on since lunch!"

"During that eon-long period I have been thinking and resting!" Lon answered gaily. He was not at all sure whether Heln saw the scanner recordings taken at Scientific Mechanics. If she did, she would be well aware of what he had been doing—officially.

"Lazy!" she accused. "And I've been having a heck of a time of it!"

"Really?" Lon asked, genuinely interested. "In what way?"

"The usual way—Matriarchal Martha!"

"Oh, and what's the Prime Minister been doing to you, now?"

"It's a bit involved," Heln explained, sipping her drink. "The point is, she got that wonderful report about the sudden disappearance of the illicit machines. Naturally she was pretty bucked up; it seemed as though we had got somewhere at last. Then the blow fell. When she came to give me one of her very rare congratulations, I had to tell her what the Police Commissioner had reported."

"And what had that clever woman discovered?" Lon asked as Heln paused for breath. "Something nasty?"

"Very nasty! A few hours after the illicit machines had all vanished—we still don't know how, by the way—a report came in to a police station that a machine had appeared in a private house—full of books."

Lon whistled softly. Heln may not have known it, he thought, but that whistle was one of genuine concern.

Heln nodded to his whistle. "Yes, pretty steep, eh? Then the reports came in in dozens. These book machines were turning up all over the place. And the worst part of it is—the books are classics in the original editions!"

"Good Lord!" Lon exclaimed with a fair degree of acting ability. "Stolen from the State Library?"

"No—and that's what's stumped us—the Library copies are all intact. We just can't think how they do these things. One thing is certain though—they're not a commercial organisation as we first thought."

"What makes you say that? If they're not commercial, what are they?"

"Political. That can be the only reason they chose to fill their machines with original classics. After all they——"

Heln stopped, realising the implications her words carried. Then she decided there was no sense in shirking it.

"Well, I mean, the classics in their original versions could be dangerous to the State. It's necessary to take certain precautions to ensure that some forms of literature

don't get into the hands of irresponsible people. That's why the State issued modified forms of the classics."

"I see," Lon said, with a smile. "So that's how the Government justifies it. And have these copies of the original classics fallen into the hands of irresponsible people?"

Heln hesitated, as Lon knew well she would. "Not—not exactly," she admitted. "Most of the machines seem to have been placed in the houses of people scheduled as thinkers and intellectuals generally. But"—she hastened to add—"it's always possible that the books will pass out of the original hands."

"True enough," Lon agreed. He finished his drink in one swallow, then looked fixedly at Heln. "But it's not so much of a problem if the books stay in the original hands? The Government doesn't think there's any danger from the intellectuals?"

Heln bit her lip and felt annoyance rising within her at Lon's slow drawl. He had seen through the position quite clearly.

"There's no need for sarcasm," she exclaimed. "You'll only start another quarrel. Anyway, it's certain now that these underground people are in league with the Techs!"

Lon needed all his control to remain seated at that. "In league with the Techs!" he exclaimed. Then he recovered himself. "Oh, I see. You mean their political motives line up with the Tech idea of running things. Umm, maybe you're right. Does the rest of the Government think the same way as you do?"

"Yes, indeed! When the Prime Minister heard about this new development, she nearly went mad. I've never seen her quite so angry. She stamped up and down the office, cursing the Techs and all their works for placing traitors in our midst like that. Of course, she seemed to think *I* was largely to blame for what had happened. I'm not sure she doesn't suspect *me* of being a Tech agent!"

Lon hastened to reassure her, smiling inwardly at the Prime Minister's superb bit of acting. True enough, she was a crafty old woman!

"That was bad luck," he sympathised. "Still, I expect she'll get over it all right. What's the Government going to do about it?"

"Have another drink?" Heln asked, and before he could answer she had whipped the glasses away and taken them across to the bar.

Lon stared at her back while she ordered the new drinks. Something was definitely up! Heln didn't behave like this for no reason at all. Could it possibly be that she had discovered something which pointed to his complicity in the underground movement? Was she, the little devil, laughing at him all the while—knowing that she had him strapped under a circular saw? He wouldn't put it past her. And yet—he felt she would not take such a revelation so sweetly. She would probably fly at him like a tigress!

Heln came back, smiled pleasantly and gave him his drink. "Here's to us!" she toasted.

Lon raised politely enquiring eyebrows, but seconded her toast right enough. She laughed and shook her head, indicating that that subject was not open for discussion.

Lon, refusing to be put off, repeated his question: "What's the Government going to do about these book machines?"

"Oh, bother," Heln exclaimed. "I wanted to leave it until after dinner, when we're both feeling rosily comfortable. Oh well, you might as well have it now. The point is, these underground people seem to be possessed of black magic. They do the most impossible things like taking money from the machines, putting the book machines in people's homes, and somehow getting hold of the only original classics there are—without taking them. Of course, commonsense tells us it's not black magic. But there's no doubt they've got special facilities to say the least!"

"It certainly seems that way," Lon agreed. "So?"

"Well, whatever facilities they've got must be carried out by machines. The Government's got machines, but it doesn't know anything about them. We thought that, in

return for the years of privilege they've had, the Scientific Mechanics might help us solve the problem."

This time, Lon did stand up. He sat down again immediately, mainly because his legs didn't seem to agree with the upright posture. A good deal of his drink became spilled on the table. For some seconds he didn't answer, too busy with the clamouring thoughts inside his head.

The position was utterly ludicrous! To begin with, the Government had always only just tolerated the Scientific Mechanics, was always making the entry tests more difficult, was for ever preventing their doing certain things—and yet now the Government was asking the Mechanics to help.

That was to begin with. Secondly, and most ludicrous of all, was the fact that the Scientific Mechanics were responsible for the very problem for which their aid was being enlisted!

The thoughts became a little confused in Lon's mind, confused but inescapable. The Prime Minister had agreed to the Scientific Mechanics being asked to help. She was pretending to the Government that she thought the underground was Tech inspired. The Government thought the Techs were behind it. The Prime Minister really thought the underground was a commercial organisation because she *knew* it was nothing to do with the Techs. She knew that Lon was a leader in the Scientific Mechanics and a henchman to herself, but she didn't know he was anything to do with the underground.

It became a little clearer. Obviously, the Prime Minister, knowing Lon was a leader of the Scientific Mechanics, and that he was "on her side," thought that he would be able to arrange the help that the Mechanics gave so that it would not conflict with her own schemes in favour of the Techs. That's why she had given permission for the Mechanics to be approached.

Heln, watching Lon while he thought, realised she hadn't expected quite such a sensational reaction from him. She knew it was rather an odd situation, but surely not as odd as all that! The man seemed to be petrified.

Did that mean that he considered the request outrageous? She had been careful to mention the privileges the Mechanics had received, but she guessed that wouldn't pull the wool over Lon's eyes, really. The Government was stumped, and they'd be mighty relieved if the Mechanics agreed to help.

"Well," Lon said slowly, wondering himself how to cover up his hesitation. "That beats the book, all right. I never thought I'd see the day when the Government came to us for help!"

Heln took refuge in dignity. "It's the duty of all citizens to aid the State where they can."

"Umm," was Lon's non-committal reply. "Of course, I can't give an answer without consultation with the other members, but I'll call a meeting as soon as possible to discuss it."

"That's fine," Heln said, back to her old self. "But unofficially, do you think there's anything you can do?"

Lon laughed—and took great pleasure in it. "Oh, we could help all right, but it might mean a drastic change in legislation!"

"What kind of change?" Heln wanted to know. "Anything within reason would be agreed by the Government."

"I bet it would," Lon grinned.

And, rising, he intimated his desire to have some dinner.

CHAPTER TEN

Preparations

LON was chuckling quietly to himself as he knocked on the Prime Minister's front door. In a way, he had to admit, he'd been pretty mean to Heln. All through dinner he had refused to say what the Scientific Mechanics could do for the Government. Instead, he had kept plugging away at the fix the Government was in, extrapolating and exaggerating the effects of the book-vendors and the reactions of the people. All the time he had subtly implied that only the Scientific Mechanics could resolve the problem—and that Heln would probably have got a more favourable response from them if she hadn't turned down their electronic brain idea so flatly.

And all the time Heln had kept her annoyance hidden. Knowing that so much depended on keeping in favour with Lon and the Mechanics, she had grovelled as far as her natural dignity would allow—with no thought for the fact that she was Home Secretary.

Yes, it had been mean. Still, Lon thought, it would teach her a lesson.

In a little while he was standing in the Prime Minister's study, looking at Martha's radiant face.

"Here it is," she said. "All finished. Now it's up to you to get the thing broadcast. I'm depending on you, Lon."

"In more ways than one, I gather," he replied.

The Prime Minister asked what he meant. Lon explained the conversation he'd had with Heln—only implying that it had been in her official capacity. Martha confirmed his suspicions.

"That's right. When they put the idea up to me, I saw at once that you could handle the thing right. We'll

be able to extend the Mechanics' powers in practically any way you want, and a bunch of bright physicists like you ought to be able to solve the problem for us! We can work together so that Tech purposes are served."

"Sure enough," Lon agreed enthusiastically. "We ought to make great strides under those conditions. What shall we aim at first?"

Martha waved the question aside. "Never mind about that for the moment. This other business is more important. Now, here's the script. I take it you've seen Nhuga and arranged for him to make the broadcast?"

Lon assured her that the whole thing was settled.

"Good. Now here's the full story—it'll surprise you. This broadcast is only the first phase of the attack. As soon as it's over, the second phase begins. Did you know that the Techs had a satellite station?"

Lon jumped, sincerely. "A satellite!"

"Of course you didn't!" Martha exclaimed triumphantly. "It's one of the best-kept secrets of the war! Only about five people know about it—apart from the crew, of course."

"So the satellite's manned?" Lon asked incredulously.

"Heavens yes! It wouldn't be much use to us if it weren't. Anyway, there it is, up there somewhere, circling the Earth and keeping everything under observation. It would have been a boon in the days when things were accomplished by violence. Moonette—that's the name of the station—can release guided missiles to any part of the world, accurately."

Lon had recovered his calm, outwardly. "Pretty good," he agreed. "And how does it help us now?"

"I've made arrangements with the Techs in charge for a whole lot of missiles to be released so that they explode all over the country at the moment the broadcast ends."

"What!" Lon cried, astounded. "You'll bomb the country?"

Martha chuckled. "Only with leaflets, dear boy. I wouldn't take the risk of using explosives to kill and wound. No, these missiles will explode in the air with

just sufficient force to release the leaflets. The country will be showered with them—and after they've heard this broadcast the people will be in a particularly receptive mood. Good idea?"

Lon, relieved at the news that no bombing was to take place, almost started to feel affection for the woman. "Brilliant," he agreed. "So the whole thing's tied up?"

"Exactly. They are waiting up there for the command to fire. As soon as you give me the time the broadcast will end, I'll let them know. So find out as soon as you can—and make sure it's accurate."

"I will," Lon said. "First thing in the morning. Well, I'll take this scrip along to Nhuga and prepare it for transmission. Be seeing you."

"You will, Lon, you will—and under much better circumstances than these furtive meetings. Goodbye for now."

As he walked back to the Scientific Mechanics building, Lon was in a daze. This business of the satellite had completely floored him. There seemed to be nothing he could do about it. Those missiles would reach their targets, there was no doubt about that. The Scientific Mechanics had nothing that would stop them. Given a few weeks or months they might be able to develop something, but he couldn't hold the broadcast off for that length of time.

He stumbled along despondently, convinced that all his good work—all the hard work of the other members—had been wasted. For those leaflets would have their effect even if they followed his broadcast and not the Prime Minister's.

When he reached the building he went straight to the rejuvenation room, undressed and placed himself on the couch. Subtly, silently and smoothly, the rejuvenator got to work. His muscles were gently massaged. His lungs were filled with almost pure oxygen. His mind was lulled with pleasing rhythms and fluid melodies. Gradually the tension eased away. The tautness of his mind and body relaxed. A tingling warmth spread through every part of him. The metabolites accumulated during the day wer

washed away from him and he rose from the couch as fresh as if he had just stepped from his bed after a night of dreamless sleep.

And suddenly he saw it. Right in front of his eyes. He had been wrong about the satellite and the missiles! Exultation swept through him as he realised that Martha had played into his hands completely. All that was necessary was to rewrite his broadcast script.

He strode briskly to his room, scorned the couch that would have taken him underground, and sat himself at the desk. Then, with the paper facing away from the scanners, he began to tap out rapidly on the typeprinter.

No grey light of dawn crept into Lon's room the following morning. The light burning overhead fought and killed the paler light of the rising sun. Beneath it, Lon still tapped at the typeprinter, but the work was nearly done.

The feeling of exultation had not left him. All through the night the glow within him had urged his fingers to greater speeds—seeking to capture the thoughts that were in his head. Thoughts that had lain there dormant for years, with no opportunity to use them. Now was the time. Every trick of phrase and meaning, every vestige of proof and proven was brought to the fore and set down on the paper.

At length, the job was done. But Lon did not sit back and congratulate himself. He glanced once at the clock on his desk, noted the time. Then he stirred himself from the chair and went out of the building. No one else, apparently was up.

Nor was Nhuga when Lon arrived at the hospital. Without waiting for the porter to show him the way, Lon ran up the stairs that led to Nhuga's bedroom, flung open the door.

"What the heck!" exclaimed Nhuga, sitting up in bed. He hadn't yet recognised Lon.

"Urgent case," Lon said. "You're needed right away!"

Nhuga stopped rubbing his eyes, hopped from the bed and started pulling on a dressing-gown and scarf. He seemed to have become fully awake in a split-second. Just as he was slipping his feet into soft shoes, he looked up to ask a question and saw that it was Lon who stood there.

He relaxed, dropped on the bed and sat with his head between his hands. "One of these days, you'll kill me," he said.

"Never mind," Lon said brightly. "Trouble is, I've got a lot to do today. That's why I'm early. That script I gave you yesterday—it's scrapped. Here's the new one"—Lon tossed the papers on the bed beside Nhuga. "Get cracking on it as soon as you can; I've no idea yet when it can be sent out and I want you to know every letter of it by then."

"Maybe you wouldn't mind if I had just one more hour's sleep?" Nhuga asked sarcastically.

"Nhuga," Lon said softly. "If you put that script over right, this is going to be the climax. You'll be able to have an oscillograph."

Nhuga looked up at him and started a slow smile. "You're a glutton for hyperbole, Lon. In that case, why the heck don't you clear out and let me get to work on this script!"

Lon left him, confident that the man would do his best—and Nhuga's best would be quite, quite good enough.

Outside the hospital, Lon felt the first pangs of hunger. The day would be a long one he knew. Nourishment was called for. A little way along the street was a State café—open all night for the benefit of hospital staff and visitors. Lon turned into it, ordered a meal from the robot-server and ate it with relish.

By the time it was all over, he reckoned the State Broadcasting System would be astir, preparing for the morning news bulletins. With luck, even the Regional Director might be awake.

As Lon came abreast of the building he saw a light in the RD's window and knew that he would not have to wait. He took the lift up and marched straight into the RD's office.

"Bless my soul!" she exclaimed. "What's the matter—insomnia?"

"Nothing so banal," Lon laughed. "Fact is, I've a lot to do today and I'm tidying up some loose ends early."

"Do I come into the category of a loose end?" the RD grinned.

"No but the script for my broadcast does."

The RD widened her eyes. "The script? Give it to me! Quickly! It may be a loose end to you but it's going to *fill* a loose end for me! Hand over."

She stood with hand outstretched. Lon took it and stroked it gently.

"Take it easy," he said. "This kind of thing's bad for the blood-pressure—besides, you'll get ulcers. I haven't got the script with me but"—the RD snatched her hand away in mock anger—"it's all finished and ready for you. Only thing is, I can't give it myself. Too busy. Still, I've arranged for an old friend to give it for me. Nhuga. Remember him?"

"Nhuga, Nhuga," the RD mused. "Yes, I think so. He's all right for delivery. Not a good face for TV, but all right for sound. Okay, I don't care who gives it so long as someone does."

"That's fine," Lon said. "Now, he wants to know when you want to broadcast it. Can you tell me?"

"To the minute, dear boy," the RD answered, reaching out for a file. "Let's see. Umm. Umm. Umm. Yes, it'll be at 11 a.m. precisely tomorrow. All right?"

"That's fine, too. Okay, then. Nhuga will be here in plenty of time. Be seeing you."

The RD called after him at the door. "Many thanks for this, Lon. It's a boon. The cheque'll reach you in a day or two."

"The cheque?" he said, hesitating. "Oh, yes, the cheque! Good."

He'd forgotten he was being paid for this. Somehow it seemed like obtaining money under false pretences!

Swiftly, Lon made his way back to the Scientific Mechanics building. It seemed to him that he had been

shuttling to and fro from the building for a lifetime. He grinned mirthlessly and went inside, turning the grin into a smile for the benefit of the policewoman on duty.

Once inside, he called a general meeting. Casting caution aside for the moment, he had everyone down in the workshop and outlined his plan to them. After explaining what had happened about the broadcast and the missiles, he went on to explain what action the Scientific Mechanics would take.

"This is the climax," he told them. "The day we've been waiting for for years. We can't fail. Every 'hidden' member must be informed and told to stand by. Their role will be to give advice to everyone after the leaflet raid has occurred. That script of mine will stir people up to a pitch of frenzy against the Techs and against the present Government. When the leaflets begin to fall, the people will tend to go berserk. They'll fume with indignation at the Techs and at the inefficiency of a Government that allows leaflets to fall in that way. The 'hidden' members must be warned that the people may tend to become violent—the valve might give and then there'd be chaos. Our members must prevent violence. They must advise the people to storm their local authorities, demanding machines so as to compete equally with the Techs. But that's all.

"At the moment the broadcast ends, we want thousands of radio speakers téléported to all parts of the country—in the streets. That way we can give instructions to the masses."

"How are we going to do that?" one member wanted to know. "We haven't got broadcasting facilities?"

"Not yet, but we will have," Lon explained. "A main body must be ready and waiting for when the broadcast ends. That body will advance on the State Broadcasting premises and take over—there won't be any trouble; most of the staff will be hypnotised anyway. We'll broadcast propaganda continuously from the moment we take over. That will be our greatest aid—the people will see how helpless the Government is."

Lon spent a little while allocating jobs to the various members—some of them to inform the “hidden” members, some of them to start making the speakers for teleportation, others to prepare propaganda for broadcasting after the building had been taken over. Very soon they were all hard at work.

Once more, Lon walked away from the Scientific Mechanics building and made his way towards the Home Office. This time he asked to be sent straight up to Heln, and the robot-commissionaire told him that Heln was agreeable. Lon reckoned she would be.

When he arrived at her office she was waiting at the door for him. Eagerly expecting an answer to last night’s question, she led him into the office, where a robot-waiter held drinks and cigars—not scented cigarettes this time.

“Did you call a meeting?” she asked, as soon as he was inside the door. “Sit down, have a drink, have a smoke.”

“Yes, I called a meeting,” Lon answered quite truthfully. “But I won’t sit down or do any of the other things, because I want you to fix a meeting for me with the Prime Minister.”

“Have you thought of a way to beat the book machines?”

“Yes indeed. Now if you’ll get on to Madam Martha——”

“But what are you going to do? What is your plan?”

“Ahah, that is for the Prime Minister’s ears only, my cherub. Now, be a good girl and ask her to see me.”

Heln pouted. “You mean you’re not going to tell me what the meeting decided, or what the Scientific Mechanics can do to help? That’s mean! And the Prime Minister won’t see you anyway. She never sees anyone without an appointment.”

“I think she’ll see me,” Lon smiled slyly. “Just ask her and see.”

Defiantly, Heln rang through to the Prime Minister’s secretary and told him to ask Martha whether she’d see Lon Aro from the Scientific Mechanics—right away.

A second or two later, Heln rammed the switch-off lever over and flushed scarlet. Without looking at him, she told him: "You can go through. My secretary will guide you."

Lon stepped quickly over to her as she bent over her desk. He planted a quick kiss on her cheek and then fled from the office.

Martha looked up expectantly when he was shown into her office. He started off by explaining his unusual approach.

"I didn't want to leave it till tonight," he said. "And I thought the best plan was to make an appointment through the Home Secretary."

"That's all right, my boy. I can handle that kind of thing all right. Now, what's your news?"

"It's just that the broadcast is all fixed up for 11 a.m. tomorrow. It'll finish at 11.45 precisely."

"Good. That's fine work you've done, Lon. I'll not forget it when I'm—er—serving in a different capacity, shall we say."

"Yes, let's say that," Lon grinned. "Oh, and the other thing is that I think the Scientific Mechanics will be able to help you. We're going to spend today on tackling the problem, that's why I came here early. I don't think you need worry about those book machines any more."

"You certainly are valuable, Lon," Martha said, smiling fondly at him. "It's a great help to an old lady like me to have such a capable young man around."

Lon chuckled inside himself. Poor defenceless creature that she was! Planning to have guided missiles shot all over the country!

"That's all right," he grinned. "All in the cause."

"And a very good cause, too, Lon. Well, I'll be listening to the broadcast at home tomorrow. I won't allow radio receivers in the Government building! Let me know how the book-machine problem goes."

Lon promised that he would and left her, carefully making a detour past Heln's office. He didn't want to get caught up with her again just yet.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Zero Hour

LON went straight from the Government building back to Scientific Mechanics. Passing through to the workshop, he saw that most of the men were hurrying about their various jobs, and that things were getting well under way. Then he noticed that old Jeb was seated at a calculator, finding it difficult to keep still. The old man looked up, saw Lon, jumped up and ran towards him. "Lon!" he cried. "I've made another discovery! Much more important this time!"

"Good, good," Lon answered, somewhat taken aback by the old man's enthusiasm. "What's it all about?"

Jeb stared around irritably at the men who were making considerable noise constructing the speakers and book-vendors. Then the old man shrugged.

"They've got to do it, I suppose. Let's go through to the meeting room where it's quieter."

A little impatiently, Lon followed Jeb through. They sat themselves at a table and Jeb set up a typeprinter and a drawing-slate. He stared at Lon for a moment and then laughed self-consciously.

"It's difficult to find a starting-point," he said. "Still, look at it like this. It's been known for centuries that energy is just another form of matter, and vice versa, correct?"

"True enough," Lon answered. "Einstein. 1905 or thereabouts."

"Right. Well, take this teleporter we've got. It takes the matter of the object, converts it into energy, transmits the energy to a distance and then reconstitutes it into

matter in the same form as it was before—simply by following a logical sequence of breakdown and build-up.”

Lon nodded. This much was straightforward. What was the old boy driving at?

“ Now, while I was messing about with the teleporter trying to get better and more accurate range, I hit on a new principle that can be applied to it. What happens if we feed in extra energy while the original energy of the object is being transmitted?”

Lon sat up at the direct question. He’d expected to be informed, not interrogated.

“ Er—let’s see now. Extra energy while—why, I imagine we’d simply increase the bulk of transported energy and it would be released as energy at the destination. Could be dangerous.”

“ Could be,” Jeb agreed. “ But not if we do it right. It won’t be released as energy either. We can feed in the extra energy so that it drops into the build-up pattern already established in the machine. In which case it will come out the other end as matter—in the same form as the pattern we started with. D’you see what that means?”

Lon did indeed. He sat up sharply and stared at Jeb. “ Jupiter! It means we can duplicate the original object as many times as we like—so long as we feed in equivalent energy! That’s a miracle—but can we do it?”

Jeb chuckled. He drew the drawing towards him and started to rough out a circuit diagram. His stylo sped over the slate, inserting resistors, capacitors, shunts, valves and a multiplicity of electrical devices with accustomed ease.

“ I think this’ll do the trick,” he claimed. “ It all came in a burst once the basic idea was established. Of course, it’ll be a severe strain on our generators, but I think they’ll stand it—for a while, anyway. See what you think.”

He pushed the slate over to Lon, who carefully studied the spidery tracings. At intervals he nodded as he followed the circuit from point to point. At length he looked up at Jeb, reached over and slapped the old man’s shoulder.

"It looks all right to me, Jeb, old fellow. I'm game to try it anyway. We'll put it into action right away! This is sheer genius."

"Let's wait and see if it works!" Jeb cautioned.

Lon and Jeb went back into the workshop with the slate. All teleporting was stopped for the moment while Jeb made his adjustments to the teleporter. Other men tapped the generators so that maximum power could be supplied to the teleporter. Lon ordered one of the speakers to be brought in front of the machine and stood before the lens.

Finally, Jeb straightened up and announced that he was finished. He inspected the power hook-up and pronounced it satisfactory.

"Good," Lon said. "We'll try it out on this speaker. Feed in just enough energy to make, say, three of them, and teleport them to the other side of the room. If it works over that distance, it should work over much wider ranges."

Everyone stood clear. Jeb focused the lens on the speaker, cut in the sliding resistance on the teleporter. At the moment the speaker disappeared, the old man flicked the power hook-up switch and let a torrent of extra energy pour into the machine. Then he switched off.

Across the workshop stood two and a half speakers.

Lon laughed as he looked at them. The forlorn half of a speaker looked so ludicrous somehow, standing beside its two complete brethren.

"Not quite enough energy for three," he commented. "Still, it'll be easy enough to calculate the proper amount. The fact is, your method works, Jeb!"

The other men in the workshop crowded round for an explanation of the minor miracle. Lon let Jeb do the explaining and was pleased that the old man got so much pleasure from it. Then, when time enough had elapsed, he called the men to order.

"Well, men, this looks like being a decisive event for us. With Jeb's adaptation of the teleporter we can increase our placements infinitely—assuming we have enough

energy. We haven't enough energy for that, but we *have* got enough to make a whale of a difference to our methods. This is what I want you all to do; this is the modified plan of attack to follow the broadcast tomorrow."

Some of the men took out printwriters and took notes. Others nodded agreement as Lon made his various points.

"To begin with," Lon continued, "we needn't make any more speakers. The ones we have will be sufficient to give us about thirty 'shots'—each of which with extra energy will place anything up to a thousand copies. That is, we'll be able to place thirty thousand copies. These should be enough to cover the principle centres and they can be supplemented by the verbal advice of our hidden members."

One man objected. "I think we'd be safer if we sent out sixty shots, Lon. We could make the extra thirty speakers between now and tomorrow morning if we work all night."

Lon nodded. "All right, Frank. If you're prepared to do that, pick a team and get to work. Good. Now the next point is that we shall want to make enough vendors, classics and other literature to go into practically every house in the country. And in addition, I'm going to write a propaganda booklet specially designed to follow the broadcast. We can mass-produce it here with Jeb's new method. Then the booklets will be placed in the vendors—with some plebian title in the case of intelligentsia placings. That'll tend to prevent people getting the booklets out of the machines before the right time.

"First thing tomorrow morning we start teleporting these vendors to every house in the country—indiscriminately. We don't care who gets them so long as everybody gets one!"

"Why can't we start teleporting right now?" a member wanted to know.

"Because there's sure to be a rush of reports to the police if we do—people have already reported the vendors. If things look sticky to the Government, the Prime Minister might call off the broadcast. But as it's

scheduled to start at 11 a.m. tomorrow, the reports won't be in and studied soon enough. The whole thing will be over before the police can act.

"Once we've got a vendor in practically every house our power will be amply demonstrated—and so will the Government's inefficiency. Any more questions?"

Lon answered a few queries, then told the men to go to it—he would write the booklet. The men dispersed with high tension in the air.

Early next morning Lon was back in the workshop, supervising the send-off of the vendors. His booklet had been written and mass-produced by the multi-teleporter. Jeb had worked most of the night, experimenting with the teleporter and working out the exact amounts of extra energy needed to be fed in to meet each particular case. Most of the speakers had already been teleported by seven o'clock—placed high up on buildings all over the country, where they would probably not be noticed until the Scientific Mechanics began to broadcast; one essential component had been left out of the speakers and they would not work until it had been inserted. The insertion would take place a few minutes before the broadcast.

One after the other, the book-vendors containing Lon's booklet, disappeared from the workshop—to appear in multiplied form in rows of houses. The extra thirty machines had been made well on time by Frank and his team. They stood waiting for their turn.

As each vendor came in front of the lens, Jeb focused on it and switched on the normal power. Then, by means of a time switch, he fed in a calculated gush of extra power built up in condensers attached to the generators. As soon as the gush had passed out of the condenser, an automatic cut-in started the feed again so that the condenser was ready for the next vendor.

Lon satisfied himself that the work was going as it should. He then sat himself once more in front of a type-printer and tapped out the opening announcement that the Mechanics would make when they took over the broad-

casting station. He called in the men he had selected for the task of storming the radio building and briefed them succinctly. Every phase of the operation was covered, allowing for snags and unforeseen difficulties.

Then he gave them the script—a copy each—and told them that the first man to get to the all-region microphone should read the script. It contained, among other things, directions as to how the people could obtain their instruction booklets from the vendors. It then went on to describe the purpose behind the Scientific Mechanics' plans, consolidating what was in the booklet and what was in the script that Nhuga would read.

Principally it was intended to allay any fears that the people might have about the Mechanics' intentions. It was clearly shown that they had no desire to rule—only to promote a rule in which machines were given their proper place and in which society could compete on a basis of equality with the Techs.

The men understood their jobs perfectly, for Lon questioned them minutely until they had memorised every aspect. He dismissed them and looked at the clock.

It had turned 10.30 a.m.

Lon left the Scientific Mechanics building and walked towards the broadcasting station. The streets were quiet. Most people were at work. Casually they would be listening to the programmes coming over the State speakers in their office buildings, in their factories and hospitals, in their workshops and laboratories. Listening casually because it was the same old stuff—the Government liquidity of entertainment. Soon, they would hear a new announcement, a new programme—and they wouldn't listen casually any more.

It was ten to eleven when Lon arrived at the broadcasting station. He enquired of the porter which studio Nhuga would be speaking from. The man checked a list and told him. Lon went straight up, by-passing the Regional Director's office for once.

Nhuga was sitting in the studio ante-room, smoking and glancing at his script. Lon asked him how he felt. Nhuga

glanced at the walls before he spoke—a silent reminder that plain talk was not possible.

“Pretty fine,” Nhuga said. “I’m expecting half your fee for this, you know!” At the same time, he jerked a thumb upwards and raised his eyebrows.

“Forty per cent, not more!” Lon laughed. “Or one hundred per cent if there are no hitches.”

Nhuga took his hidden meaning and smiled. Lon left him, confident that Nhuga would do his part of the job well.

Lon made his way round to the Prime Minister’s house. It was without precedent, his going there in daylight, but he felt the situation demanded it. He remembered that the Prime Minister had said she would listen to the broadcast at home.

Martha’s maid told him that the Prime Minister could not be disturbed on any account. He decided to wait in the lounge until she came out of her study. If she didn’t do it soon, he’d miss the broadcast himself!

But Martha appeared a few seconds after he’d seated himself on an uncomfortable antique sofa. She smiled a warm welcome. Lon chuckled inside himself.

“There you are, dear boy!” she welcomed. “Come into the study, I’ve got some surprises for you!”

She stood back for him to enter the room and then pointed to an old-fashioned escritoire in one corner. Lon looked at it and noticed nothing out of the ordinary. Martha pinched his arm, feeling very youthful in her hour of near triumph, and demonstrated how the escritoire gave her a picture of every room in the house and its occupants. She seemed delighted with Lon’s surprise.

“But that isn’t all, Lon. Come over here by the fireplace.”

She pressed the hidden control and the secret panel slid back. She motioned the astonished Lon to go through. While he marvelled at the room’s contents, Martha went across and switched on the radio. The programme preceding the broadcast was coming to an end.

"I've just been giving Moonette the time the broadcast ends," the Prime Minister explained. "Of course, they'll have to release the missiles long before that so that they get here in time. I shouldn't be surprised if they've let them go already—I don't know enough about these things."

Lon forced his thoughts away from the incredible machinery in the room and considered the point. "It depends a lot on their velocity, of course! But I expect they'll be releasing them within a few minutes, anyway. You've certainly got some stuff here, Martha. How did you——?"

A wave of the Prime Minister's hand cut him off. The opening announcement of the broadcast had begun. "Sit and listen," Martha said.

Surreptitiously, while Martha fiddled with the volume control on the radio, Lon slipped a pair of ear plugs in. He wasn't too sure about the strength of his own mind to resist the hypnotic words that Nhuga would soon be speaking.

All sound ceased for him, but he could see that Martha was listening intently. He saw her put on an expression of distaste and reckoned that would be caused by the announcement that Nhuga had thought up to stop strong minds listening. He could see that she made an instinctive movement to switch off and then, recollecting herself, abstained. She settled down to hear the broadcast proper.

Sitting across from her, Lon studied her face. A sense of calm had come over him suddenly. Everything was going to be all right. He could imagine the voice of Nhuga throwing out the preparatory hypnotic remarks. Martha would accept them as the opening build-up that Lon had supplied when preparing the script for broadcasting. There was certainly no sign that Martha was being hypnotised!

After a while, he saw the expression on her face change. She stared at the speaker incredulously. Lon guessed that Nhuga had come to the point, and was giving out the Mechanics' propaganda. Martha continued to stare for some minutes. Then she shot a sharp glance at Lon.

He smiled at her serenely.

Lon saw her mouth open and close rapidly. No doubt she was cursing him roundly. He decided it would be safe to remove the ear plugs now. He did so and heard:

"——utterly outrageous! It's inconceivable that the Regional Director has let that through. And you're responsible for this, Lon? I'm hurt, deeply hurt. But you'll be hurt worse! This is treason—and you'll suffer as much as I can make you. I shall—the leaflets! If the leaflets follow this, the people will go mad! And I can't stop them! The missiles have already been released!"

She got up and ran to a visiphone on the nearby bench. Lon watched her dial, noted that she was getting through to the broadcasting station. He smiled as the screen lit up—and showed the grinning face of a Scientific Mechanic.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Finale

THE Prime Minister stepped back as though a snake had reared its head in the screen. She swung round on Lon and opened her mouth to speak. She was cut short by the buzz of a telephone. She stepped across and flicked the switch. The screen lit up with the countenance of secretary Roberts—her private secretary.

"Madam," he jerked out. "The Government building has been invaded! A whole crowd of men have poured in and are trying to take over. I don't——"

Lon stepped nearer so that Roberts could see him. "All right, Roberts," he said. "This is the great day. Give them all the help you can."

Roberts' face broke into a wide smile. "The great day at last, eh? Boy oh boy. I'll be off then, Lon. Er—excuse me—madam!" And, grinning, he switched off.

Turning to Martha, Lon saw that she was almost bursting. "Do you mean to say—is that man—are you——!"

"Roberts is one of our 'hidden' members, if that's what you mean, Martha dear!" Lon explained. "He's been very useful to us, too. I hope he finds a good place in the new régime."

"New régime? What are you talking about?"

"You don't seem to have caught on, Prime Minister-ex. This is the end of your Government and its rule. It's almost certainly the end of you, too!"

Nhuga's voice was still coming through the speaker, delivering the propaganda that must be making people sit up and take notice all over the country. Lon nodded towards the radio.

"That somewhat croaky voice is really your death-knell, Martha. The opening paragraphs hypnotised listeners into a receptive state—didn't you know Nhuga was a hypnotist?—and now they're getting the real truth over their radio for the first time. A lot of them are going to be pretty sore!"

"Ridiculous!" Martha exploded. "As if a silly speech on the radio can effect a revolution. This has been a great shock to me, Lon, and it's going to cause a great deal of harm and disturbance. But it can all be put down by our forces. The whole thing will be forgotten in a few weeks—except by you!"

"I think you're wrong, Martha. I don't think you realise what's been happening to people all these years. They've been simmering all the time. And every day, the simmer temperature has got higher. They're close on boiling-point now, but it's still a simmer. But it won't be a simmer any more once they get hold of those leaflets."

"Nonsense!" Martha refused to believe him. "I'll go back to the Government building immediately and put a stop to this crazy invasion which you, presumably, have started. I'll have a word for that young Roberts, too. I insist that you accompany me. Will you agree, or shall I send for the police?"

"The police are going to be pretty busy anyway," Lon laughed. "I shouldn't bother them. Besides, I'd like to come."

"Very well. We'll go immediately."

Martha went over and switched off the radio. Nhuga was just putting over the final phrases.

Lon had to admire the way Martha, in the face of tremendous catastrophe, strode briskly along the street with all the appearances of complete confidence. She walked as though she alone would take the country in her two hands and wring some sense—her sense—into its head.

As they neared the Government building, the first dull thuds could be heard and the first fluttering batch of leaflets came tumbling down. Martha brushed them aside and strode into the Government building.

A group of Scientific Mechanics politely barred her way. Then they saw Lon and responded to his gesture to let her through.

"How's it going?" Lon asked them as he passed.

"A walk-over!" one of the men answered. "We just sailed in and took over. All the women are standing around wondering what the heck to do next."

Martha must have heard the last sentence at least. She paused on her way to the lift and glared at the man who had spoken.

"I'll soon show them what to do, young man! Then watch out, for you'll be in trouble!"

The man was about to retort, but Lon motioned him to silence. He followed Martha into the lift and watched her press the button that would take them up to the level of the Minister's offices.

"I notice you don't use the stairs these days, Prime Minister," Lon smiled sarcastically. "Got over your phobia towards machines?"

Conscious that microphones in the walls were recording their conversation, Martha replied tartly. "One's personal inclinations must be subjugated in an hour of crisis! Speed is the essential thing today."

"And speed is what the country's getting!" Lon replied, laughing. "There's an awful lot going on at the moment, you know, Martha."

She ignored his remark and flounced out of the lift as it came to a stop and the automatic door opened. The corridor was dotted with Scientific Mechanics. Martha brushed past them and made her way to her own office. Lon followed her in.

The valiant Prime Minister sat down at her desk as if the building were still in complete possession by the Government, and flicked the call switches on an intercom system hidden in a recess in the desk. She ordered all the Ministers to come to her room immediately. Hesitant replies showed that the Ministers weren't at all sure they would be allowed to do so. Tremors in the voices indicated

that they were between the devil of the Mechanics and the deep blue sea of the Prime Minister's wrath.

Lon stepped over to the intercom and spoke into it.

"All right, boys let them through. Lon here. Everything's going fine. Keep it up."

The Ministers began to drift in. One after the other they edged shamefacedly into the office and stood before the Prime Minister's desk. She waited silently until they had all arrived, followed by a small posse of Mechanics.

"Now," she said. "What kind of Ministers are you that allow this to happen! Has the Police Commissioner been informed? You, Home Secretary! I'm asking you a question!"

Heln was standing just inside the door, staring at Lon. He tried to read the meaning of the expression in her eyes, but there was too much surprise there that was masking anything underneath. This was a problem he *wasn't* confident about. It might mean the end of their relationship, and that, to say the least, would be a pity.

Heln forced her eyes away from Lon and looked at the Prime Minister. "No, madam, the Police Commissioner hasn't been informed. This was too sudden—and the Mechanics haven't allowed me to use the communication system."

"Humph!" noised Martha. "We'll see about that!"

She reached out for the visiphone control. One of the Mechanics moved forward as though to restrain her. Lon gestured him to wait. Martha dialled the Police Commissioner's number and waited silently for the woman to appear on the screen. There was an air of poised action in the air as everyone waited to see what would happen. At length, the Police Commissioner's worried face appeared on the screen.

"I've been trying to get you, madam," she said. "But there seems to be some fault in the service. Chaos has broken out everywhere. I——"

"Chaos? What d'you mean, chaos?" Martha snapped.

"People are storming their local authorities and demanding to be given machines. There seems to be some

kind of organisation behind them—there's no violence, but they're terribly stubborn. They won't budge from the local government buildings. And then there's the leaflets. It looks as though the Techs have covered the country with them. They are making the people mad. I think——"

"Never mind what you think," Martha jumped in. "Listen. If you value your life, your honour or anything else, you'll get the entire force on the job and crush this uprising! Take the officers off every other kind of job and get them moving. Quickly, too!"

Martha switched off and glared round at the assembled company—her Ministers and the Mechanics. She looked supremely powerful and confident in her ability to deal with the situation even while surrounded by her enemies. She glared at Heln.

"You, Madam Home Secretary, are relieved of your duties from this instant. I will assume the post and get something done!" She swung round to face Lon. "Are you prepared to capitulate honourably; or do I have to fight you to the last?"

Lon smiled at her kindly. It was a horrible thing he had to do. But there was no other way.

"Madam Prime Minister, don't you understand that the fight is over? You are beaten. We've planned this day for years. Nothing can stop us now. Our task is accomplished; the fight is won."

Martha's voice rose almost to a scream. "Don't talk such darned nonsense, man! How can you talk about the fight being won when even now the police forces are being deployed on a vast scale to put a stop to this hysteria the Tech leaflets have caused? Once we can give a level-headed account to the people they'll come to their senses again—I'll get on to the Broadcasting System right now and make a special statement myself!"

Again Martha reached for the TV phone. This time Lon laid his hand on her arm. "Wait," he said.

He signalled to one of his men to open the sound-proof

window. The man stepped across smartly and swung the wide pane back.

As soon as the window was open a low murmuring came into the room, and above the murmuring the sound of a single, louder voice. Lon asked Martha to come over to the window. Puzzled, she complied.

Down below in the streets were milling throngs of people. They surged up against the Government building like a tide. Their heads were upturned. They were listening to the voice of the Mechanic announcer coming through the speaker high up on the wall.

The Prime Minister listened herself for a few moments, drank in the import of what the announcer was saying, then, flushed, she swung round.

"Where is that man speaking from? I'll have him arrested at once!"

Lon shook his head. "He's speaking from a studio at the broadcasting station. We've taken over the station. All broadcasting is in our hands. There are sixty thousand speakers like that one placed on walls all over the country. The people are being told the truth, Martha. They are being told that you are an agent for the Techs!"

Every Minister in the room sucked in her breath sharply at the accusation. Then they let it out again in a great expression of incredulity when Martha did not instantly refute it. She simply sat there staring at Lon.

"Also," he continued, "there are over twenty thousand 'hidden' members of the Scientific Mechanics spread all over the country—giving advice, leading the people in a strong campaign of non-violent demanding. But there's even more than that. The book-vendors that were worrying you are now in practically every house in the country."

Lon heard Helm's quick intake of breath and glanced up. The former Home Secretary was regarding him with an expression that definitely had something of a smile in it. But there was no time to think about that.

"And every one of those book-vendors," he went on, staring the Prime Minister straight in the eye, "contains a special booklet, printed for this occasion. The begin-

ning of the broadcast you can hear now told the people how to get those instruction booklets. Practically every person in the country is now aware of the true facts of the situation. You would have to take longer than a few weeks to talk them round to your former double-crossing tyranny!"

He spat the words out to get maximum effect. And he did. Martha's shoulders sagged. The sparkle went from her eye. She drooped over the desk like a broken flower, all purpose gone, all endeavour sterile. She let out a long sigh.

"I formally demand the surrender of your Government and the abdication of your rule!" Lon intoned.

Martha didn't look up. She remained staring at the top of her desk. "Very well. Bring the necessary documents."

Lon made a sign and one of the men stepped forward. The documents had already been prepared. He laid them on the desk in front of Martha.

"You will notice they are all in order," Lon said. "They merely require your signature and those of your Ministers."

Martha nodded. She took her old quill pen and rapidly scribbled her name to the abdication form. Then, to the infinite surprise of everyone present, she dropped forward onto the desk and burst into tears.

Lon took the form and stepped back. He indicated to the others that it would be best if they all left the room. They moved into an office next door. There Lon obtained the signatures of the Ministers. Heln abstained.

"I'm not a Minister any more," she laughed—much to Lon's relief. "I was unfrocked while Martha was still Prime Minister!"

When the signatures were complete, formal evidence that the Government was no longer in existence, Lon took a typeprinted script from his pocket and handed it to one of the Mechanics.

"This is the abdication announcement," he said. "Take it along to the studio and have it broadcast immediately. I suggest you ex-Ministers collect your

belongings and go home. I don't mean to be impolite, ladies, but we have a good deal of work to do here."

"Won't you need us to show you the hang of things, sort of?" a Minister asked.

Lon laughed. "Oh, no. Your secretaries will be able to do that for us. They are all Scientific Mechanics!"

The atmosphere of the room was almost jovial. It seemed that the Ministers were relieved at their resignations. They had all been labouring under enormous difficulties for the past year or so—struggling to do their best with an administration that was headed by someone who was trying to play into Tech hands. Now that the future of their country had been taken off their shoulders they felt wonderfully light and joyous.

As they began to file out, Heln came up to Lon. "Am I to go with the others, too?" she asked.

Looking down at her, Lon could see there was a smile behind her eyes, and admiration as well.

"Yes," he said. "You too. I'll be seeing you."

"Don't be too long!" she laughed, and was away and out of the door before he could answer.

Suddenly a great cheer went up from the street. The crowd had received the news of the Government's abdication. Lon stepped over to the window and looked down at them. Instantly the cheer intensified in volume a dozen times as the crowd caught sight of Lon. Some of the Mechanics had obviously divulged his leadership.

Lon came away from the window hurriedly. He called the men together and arranged for an election to be held immediately. The teleporter was to be used for duplicating ballot forms and these were to be sent all over the country. The election would be democratic, but Lon had a pretty shrewd idea of what kind of people would be returned to power.

Leaving a team of men to handle the election plans, he set up another group to make immediate investigation into the possibility of machine manufacture. The broad plans for this were already in existence; they simply had to be fitted into the present circumstances.

Satisfied at last that everything was moving as it should be, Lon called for a Government vehicle and left the building. Most of the crowds had moved away, but there was still a loud cheer as he drove off. He told the driver to take a circuitous route to Heln's home.

"So that's how it all worked out," Lon finished. He had explained the whole thing to Heln as she sat and listened raptly. "Of course, we had a lot of luck, but it was the machines that did it, really."

"And a burning belief in what is right," Heln supplied.

Lon looked across at her. His gaiety dropped away. His confidence was stripped from him as if it were a cloak. But beneath it all his natural courage struggled.

"Will you marry me, Heln?" he asked.

"Well, I'm not Home Secretary any more and being a Scientific Mechanic doesn't seem such a bad thing. Yes!"

THE END

*All characters in this story are fictitious and imaginary
and bear no relation to any living person.*

projectiles

TRUE

Although I have been reading s-f for years, yours are streets ahead, especially the 'Old Growler' series which seem almost like true adventures. Thanks for your fine magazine.

1921743 SAC GOODWIN,
R.A.F. Scampton, Lincs.

Space, SPACE !

What's happened to the Space? Have they stopped all flights to other planets? Let's have some more please and do not turn to fantasy.

J. E. TAYLOR, Liverpool.

A WAY TO GO

Your issues are improving steadily but I think you still have quite a way to go before you're really good. In CHAOS IN MINIATURE someone picks up the House of Commons. Now since the atoms were only packed tighter, the place still weighed the same. Some Superman!

J. D. HART, Norfolk.

PART OF IT

In my opinion Jon J. Deegan is your best writer. When I am reading one of his stories I actually feel as if I am part of 'Old Growler's' crew. To my mind you haven't had a complete failure as yet, although you came near to it with one or two.

G. G. BLUNT,

Blackenall, Staffs

NOVA SCRIPTA

Just a few lines congratulating H. J. Campbell on his *new* method of writing. Congratulations on a rather unexpected ending as well. Cover pictures are getting better. Is it possible to give a little more space to projectiles? They are jolly good.

B. SMITH, Surrey.

MONOTONOUS

Your earlier issues were a bit monotonous. I think everything up to the DARAKUA was (a) the first flight to the Moon or (b) a ground recce on some remote and utterly repulsive planet. Now we come to CHAOS IN MINIATURE. The point is, apart from the weak ending, I actually enjoyed it. It even made me laugh now and again. I heartily approve of the remark in your editorial about science-Fiction instead of Science-fiction. I've been trying to impress this on a competitor of yours for the last few months. Stick to it.

ARCHIE MERCER,

Bryants Moorings, W.4.

PLEASED

I was very pleased with Roy Sheldon's BEAM OF TERROR and sincerely hope he will write more like it.

G. MILES, Bournemouth.

MODELS

The articles on model spaceship making certainly appeal to me. My pupils are very interested in space travel and welcome inexpensive models. I suggest models of rocket sites, space stations, space suits and even the planets themselves.

H. W. KIDD,

Dunmow, Essex.

CONGRATS

Congratulations F. G. Rayer for a first-rate story. Please write some more.

BRIAN SMITH,

Warlingham, Surrey.

TOP

I read ASFm regularly because of its high standard regarding the science and absence of fantastic ideas. But I know that Lee Stanton can write better books than **REPORT FROM MANDAZO** which I have just read. Still, your book is at the top of the ladder, so keep tight hold.

J. E. TAYLOR, Bootle.

NOTE

We inadvertently left the address of the Galilean Science Fiction Society out of our report of this Club recently. Readers wishing to join should contact Miss Shirley Marriott, 59 Cardigan Road, Winton, Bournemouth, Hampshire. The Club is for fans under eighteen.

BACK NUMBERS

In response to many readers' enquiries we are publishing below a complete list of previous issues of ASF that are still available.

No. 8 **WORLD IN A
TEST TUBE**

No. 14 **PLANET OF
POWER**

No. 15 **REPORT FROM
MANDAZO**

No. 16 **THE MOON IS
HEAVEN**

No. 17 **THE COMING OF
THE DARAKUA**

No. 18 **CHAOS IN
MINIATURE**

No. 19 **SPACE WARP**

No. 20 **EARTH OUR
NEW EDEN**

No. 21 **ALIEN IMPACT**

If you have any difficulty in obtaining any of the above titles, order direct from the publishers:—

**HAMILTON & CO.
(STAFFORD) LTD.,**

**1 & 2 Melville Court,
Goldhawk Road,
London, W.12**

book reviews

Tomorrow the Stars, on the whole, is an anthology of homely stories. As editor Robert Heinlein points out in his introduction, the object of the book is to entertain and not to 'instruct, mystify, elevate or inspire.' Some of the stories, in fact, do these things, but in the main they are essentially human, not mathematical or physical in their approach. The stories are varied in their themes and cover most aspects of science fiction. Authors include Lester del Ray, Eric Frank Russell, Judith Merril and Isaac Asimov. A very good buy at \$2.95 from Doubleday & Co. Inc., 575 Madison Avenue, New York 22, New York, U.S.A.

Wrong Side of the Moon by Francis and Stephen Ashton, is a good tale that always seems as if it really happened. We think some of the reasons for its credibility is the careful characterisation of two R.A.F. types—with their sprinkling of slang, they seem just the sort we know. They help to fly the spaceship that a millionaire Irishman has built. A meteor comes along and sends the rocket off course. The story is taken from there. At this point the story tends to be a little drawn out but it gets over the conditions of space quite well. The book is certainly not lacking in suspense. Published by T. V. Boardman, 14 Cockspur Street, S.W.1, at 8s. 6d.

The second quartet of titles in the Kemsley Fantasy Book series

has been published. It is an enormous advance on the first quartet. Here we review two of them; the second pair will be noted in our next issue.

Ralph 124C41 is the classic story that Hugo Gernsback wrote and published on *Modern Electrics* back in 1911. As Hugo points out in his Preface, the literary style of the book is not distinguished by a long chalk; nor is the plot itself very enthralling. The value of this book lies in the astounding flights of controlled imagination that burst out on almost every page, bringing with them new and startling technical ideas. Considering this was written so long ago, the prophecies that have come to pass are little short of incredible. And, in the main, they are scientifically accurate. This must not be missed.

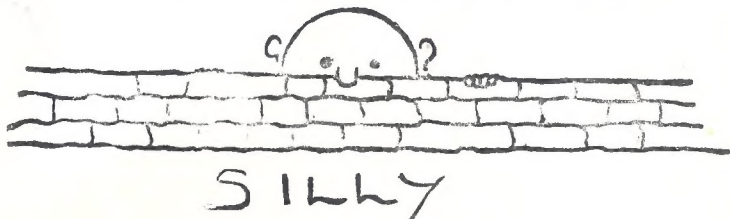
Sinister Barrier by Eric Frank Russell is said by the publishers to be 'the most unusual thriller ever written.' Not having read every written thriller, we couldn't say, but they are probably right. At any rate, we consider this to be one of the half-dozen finest books we have ever read. We cannot say enough in its praise. Suffice it then to report that we are convinced that our readers will read, enjoy and marvel at this story. You just cannot fail.

Both the above books are sold at 1s. 6d. each by Kemsley Newspapers Ltd., Gray's Inn Road, London.

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